

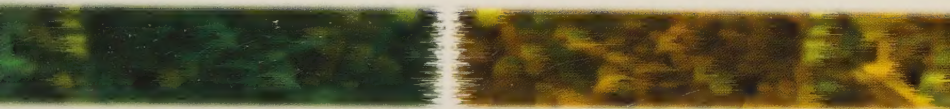


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To my friend Baro Tumsa and countless others who have paid the highest sacrifice so that the Oromo people may some day live with dignity in their homeland. To all of them I say: *A Luta Continua!*

La

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The process that led to the writing of this book began at a time when my normally turbulent life had entered a new phase. I was estranged from the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front, a movement that I participated in creating. I was also grappling with the issues that continue to pose challenges not only to the Oromo people and the Ethiopian state but also to the Horn of Africa Region. Taking stock of just what has changed and what has not appeared, to me, the starting point for charting future courses of action. Doing this when relations with colleagues had soured was compounded with facing daily challenges to survival itself. In the event, even staying in the Horn Region, the proper place to remain in touch with developments, proved impossible as pressures by the powers that be eventually resulted in my departure.

The condition under which I was forced to leave the Region disrupted not only my thought process but also the actual writing exercise. I was not able to systematically assemble and take with myself research notes and other relevant materials. Hence, I had to start all over after reaching my present location of refuge. This inevitably delayed the completion of the work.

A number of people have read the draft of this book and given me valuable comments. Mr. Ernie Regehr of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dr. Bob Matthews of the University of Toronto and Rev. Ron Ward all read an early draft and made some important suggestions and criticism. I would like to thank them for taking time to go through a very rough material and assisting me in making improvements. The views expressed in this material and whatever shortcomings it has are of course mine and do not in any way implicate them. My friend, Dr. Mohammed Hassen, took time from his busy schedule to read and comment on later drafts of this work. I say thank you, Mohammed. I also

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INTRODUCTION

When this work began in early 1995, the final touches were being put to the apparently drastic changes that were being effected in post-Dergue Ethiopia. This was at the time when a new Parliament was expected to convene, thereby ushering in a new stage in the evolution of the Ethiopian state. Thus, the subsequent convening of Ethiopia's Federal Parliament, on August 21, 1995, officially brought to an end the transitional period that was launched more than four years earlier. As with so many other issues concerning Ethiopian history and politics, controversy rages also around the significance of this event. The transitional period was launched at the July 1991 Finfinne (Addis Ababa) Conference, attended by the delegates of more than twenty participating political organizations and other personalities. The Transitional Period Charter (hereafter, Charter), adopted as an interim-constitution at this conference, stipulated that the transition can last for a maximum period of two and a half years. The fact that it took an additional eighteen months to bring it to a conclusion is one of the issues of controversy, albeit a relatively minor one. The place that August 21, 1995 will occupy in the political history of Ethiopia is the subject of a far more serious controversy.

Members of the ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front/ Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF), are convinced that on this day a totally new era dawned in the "long" history of Ethiopia. Indeed, they consider it as no less than the "birth day" of a New Ethiopia. According to their view and that of their supporters, August 21, 1995 was the day on which the arduous task of bringing both peace and democracy to Ethiopia was brought to a successful conclusion. Pronouncements such as "Ethiopia has entered a new

era of elected government determined by democratic contest and the final verdict of the ballot box”¹ abound in pro-TPLF circles. Another publication echoes a similar sentiment by stating that the Charter and other previous legislation had “paved the way for a new electoral epoch.”² The epochal significance of 21 August 1995 is painted in similar glowing colors in speeches, radio and television broadcasts and government-owned publications. These pronouncements signal a complete conviction by the TPLF and its allies that Ethiopia has indeed turned a brand new page in her history. Their conviction that the Federal set-up also has, once and for all, resolved the lingering questions of self-determination appears to be just as strong. Hence, in the opinion of the TPLF and its allies, all the tasks laid down in the Charter were fully and successfully implemented. And the promise, made at the beginning of the transitional period, to replace Ethiopia’s age-old autocratic political system with a new democratic order was fully honored.

Other opinions, however, stand in stark contrast to this official line. Let us first look at the views of TPLF’s erstwhile partners, participants in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Forming such a transitional government was one of the decisions reached at the July 1991 Finfinne Conference. Many political groups that co-operated with the TPLF by participating in this conference as well as in forming the TGE subsequently left or were expelled from the coalition government. The controversy that resulted in their departure or expulsion from the TGE did not emanate from disagreements over the political course charted at that conference. These former members of the TGE, as signatories of the Charter, consider the political course charted by it as essentially correct. They believe that, if adhered to, such a course could have led to the dawning of a genuinely democratic era in Ethiopia’s history. However, they assert that this possibility was aborted as a result of later developments that diverted the country’s political process from the course that was originally designed to lead to democracy and the genuine exercise of self-determination. Hence, they emphatically reject the official view regarding the con-

summation of these political rights. Their conviction that neither individual liberties nor the rights of nations to self-determination are being respected under the new government seems just as strong as the ruling party's opposite belief.

Members of the TGE harbor an acute feeling of disappointment with the way they were treated by the TPLF during the transitional period. Many have come to question TPLF's original sincerity in inviting them to become partners in the effort of forging a new democratic Ethiopia. They feel cheated and used at a critical moment merely to lend a facade of plurality to a set-up that was, in reality, intended to culminate in the ascendancy of a basically Tigrean-dominated regime. Most of them have no doubts that the process has in fact now ended in the restoration of a Dergue-like one-party regime instead of the pluralist democratic order that was originally envisaged. The convening of the Federal Parliament on August 21, 1995, is thus, to them, nothing more than the formalization of such a one-party regime resulting from the systematic reversal of the targets originally set at the July 1991 Conference.

This sector of the country's political opinion, however, does admit that a transition of sorts has indeed been concluded as a result of the convening of the Ethiopian Federal Parliament. According to the views prevailing in this quarter, this event helped only to formalize the transfer of the role of domination from the Amhara to Tigrean elite. Oromo intellectuals and political figures, in particular, did not have to wait for 21 August 1995 to draw such a conclusion. Asafa Jalata, an Oromo academic writing in late 1993, had already concluded that "Amhara ethnic hegemony was replaced by that of Tigray."³ In a paper presented at the African Studies Association Conference in November, 1994, I argued that a transition from one form of colonialism to another was under way. I drew parallels between the assimilationist colonial policy once pursued by the French and Portuguese in Africa with that which the Amhara elite used to practice in Ethiopia. From this I concluded that a shift to a policy reminiscent of the British system of home-rule was accompanying Tigrean ascen-

dancy to the status of the new dominant power. According to this sector's opinion, hence, 21 August 1995 merely helped to put the final touches to the replacement of the former policy of domination by a new variety.

Still another wing of Ethiopian political opinion, for totally different reasons, rejects the official view that a transition to democracy has been concluded on 21 August 1995. This third category of Ethiopian political thought takes issue with the very first steps taken to launch the transitional period. Members of this group challenge the wisdom of some of the Charter's fundamental precepts. The rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples enshrined in the Charter, in particular, are viewed as a negation of the cultivation of a single Ethiopian patriotism and identity. The resulting politicization of ethnicity, they contend, threatens to serve as a recipe for the balkanization of Ethiopia, as borne out by the experiences of former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Some members of this group appear to go even one stage further by hinting that TPLF rule is relatively more undemocratic by comparison with that of its predecessors. The editors of the newspaper, *The Express*, for example, take such a line when they state "The EPRDF, ensuring undisputed supremacy, is *erasing the traces of a democratic system of governance* which is characterized by divergence, accommodation, free competition, interest representation and intermediation"⁴ (emphasis added). This is an indication that these writers' anger at the ruling party has started to interfere with their ability to correctly recollect conditions that prevailed only a few years earlier. The traces of democracy that they accuse TPLF/EPRDF of erasing can only be a figment of their imagination, for it never existed under the system of government they eulogize. In general, the principles of government endorsed by the July 1991 Conference constitute the major departure from the political vision upheld as correct and responsible by this sector. Hence, in the views prevailing in this quarter, that previous date figures as a more important historical turning point than 21 August 1995.

Thus, with the exception of the ruling group and its allies, almost all other local political views reject the official assertion

that democracy has finally arrived in Ethiopia. Both of the rejectionist camps identified above, however, seem to agree on one thing. They do not see much difference between the manner by which the Dergue's "socialist" Constitution of 1987 was purportedly ratified by the Ethiopian peoples and the process that led to the adoption of the present Federal Constitution in 1994. Bulcha points to the similarity of these two events by concluding that "a constitution prepared and ratified by the EPRDF and its allies alone is as irrelevant and unacceptable to the majority of the peoples of Ethiopia as was the case with Colonel Mengistu's 1987 'socialist' constitution."⁵ Many are they who cannot resist the temptation of drawing parallels between the events of 21 August 1995 and what the Dergue did when it handed over power from itself to itself in September 1987. The fake nature of the former transfer of power was so obvious that it earned the Dergue regime the derision of all opposition groups, the TPLF prominent among them.

The controversy surrounding the historical significance of 21 August 1995 is likely to go on raging for a long time to come. Conviction about the absolute correctness of one's perspective being a common trait of Ethiopian politics, adherents to the above three positions are likely to stick to their respective stands. Efforts to relatively fairly assess precisely what was or was not accomplished during the transition run the risk of being drowned out by the clamor of the three wings to popularize their respective views. Under the resulting highly polarized political atmosphere, the likelihood of a neutral and completely non-partisan assessment of the transition's achievements and failures is quite unrealistic. The present work does not pretend to make-up for this shortcoming. What it will attempt to accomplish is to do such a stock-taking of the transition's achievements and failures as comprehensively as possible and as dispassionately as the situation allows.

The effort to execute such a stock-taking of the achievements and failures of the transition period will be followed by a section that focuses on the nature of the major participants in the exercise — the anti-Dergue liberation fronts. An attempt will be made to

demonstrate how the attitudes and political cultures of these key participants in the transitional exercise played a pivotal role in the derailment of the democratization pact. This second section will be concluded by looking at how the US-led international community reinforced, instead of defusing, the anti-democratic behaviors of these key actors, particularly the TPLF/EPRDF. Measures taken by the US Government, in particular, helped to endorse and thereby strengthen the culture of intolerance inherent in the historical tradition and recent political experience of especially the TPLF/EPRDF leaders.

The third section will focus on the evolution of the Ethiopian state since assuming its present shape at the beginning of the twentieth century. An attempt will thus be made to situate the developments of the transition period within the trajectory of modern Ethiopia's evolution. Demonstrating how the present Ethiopian state came into existence first as a medieval type of empire followed by a period when an attempt was made to put a very thin veneer of modern nationhood on this underlying feature will be the subject of this third section. The final section of this work expresses my views on the next stage of this evolution and how the various actors could behave in order to make that process less painful and more constructive. My conviction that Ethiopia may perish (indeed, might deserve to perish) unless additional steps are taking to end the continued subjugation of some of its inhabitants will bring this work to a conclusion.

THE CONTENT OF THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

The obvious place to start the work of taking stock of the achievements and failures of the transition would be by cataloguing the political changes that were entertained by the framers of the Charter and comparing them with those that have actually been implemented. In this way, one can check the changes that were effected during the transitional period against those that were tabled at its beginning. (A copy of the Charter is appended to facilitate quick reference.) The decision to focus on the contents of the Charter to

carry out an assessment of the transition's achievements and failures has one undeniable problem. It will not directly address the concerns of those who object to that document altogether and hence feel that the transition itself got off on the wrong foot. We will attempt, in a later section, to put the thinking that underpinned the drafting of the Charter within the context of the history of Ethiopia's evolution as a state (Part iii). There, we will explore the historical background that influenced the thinking of the camp that rejects the fundamental tenets of the Charter. For now, we will focus on comparing what political changes were espoused at the beginning of the transition with those that were carried out in practice.

When I first attempted such an assessment, in late 1993, I heavily depended on what I saw as the fundamental principles behind the drafting of the Charter. The purpose then was to provide a cursory overview of the developments that I felt were leading to the derailment of the transition. In order to do that I identified what I understood to be the fundamental principles espoused by the Charter. As one of those who participated in the drafting of that document, I saw the following four concepts as the corner stones of the belief that was to guide the effort to implement a genuine democratic transition in Ethiopia:

The Supremacy of the Law

TPLF's decision to convene the July Conference indicated a willingness to depart from the normal behavior of victorious guerrilla groups. Contrary to the common practice by such groups, it signaled a willingness to involve other forces in deliberations concerning the country's political future. In addition, this step appeared to be a departure from a political tradition that is deep-seated in the milieu from which the TPLF emerged. According to this tradition, rulers, more often than not, start their political career as rebels or outlaws, just like the TPLF. Those who are lucky to succeed in rising from the status of an outlaw to that of a law-giver normally announce the beginning of their rule by proclaiming the "*gabbir awaj*," a decree that instructs others to "sub-

mit and start paying tribute.” Such rulers, who often used to get crowned as kings or emperors, exercise such an unquestionable right to issue the decrees by which the people are required to fulfill their duties as subjects. Their supremacy over the laws that they decree is taken for granted. The Amharic saying which runs “Just as the sky cannot be plowed, so the negus (king) cannot be indicted” demonstrates the depth of this political culture. Emperor Haile Sellasie’s role as the sole lawgiver, for example, was explicitly provided for in his so-called constitution. A similar power was entrusted to the Dergue’s Workers Party of Ethiopia, although it was done in a comparatively implicit manner. Hence, the so-called constitutions of these former rulers in essence were a continuation of the *awaj* tradition of legislation.

In contrast to this entrenched political culture, the Charter was the outcome of deliberations by a number of political groups, with foreign observers serving as witnesses. It was approved as the “rules governing the Transitional Government” and as the “supreme law of the land for the transitional period.”⁶ That a government can and should be governed by a set of some earthly principles was thus recognized for the first time in Ethiopia’s history. Therefore, the Charter was not just the *awaj* (decree) of those who militarily acquired power.

According to the deep-seated political tradition referred to above, promulgating the country’s law depended, to a large extent, on the whim of the ultimate political authority. Whoever was in power exercised just as much prerogative to unmake a law he did not fancy as to make another one to his liking. A novel approach was adopted at the July 1991 Conference to avert the possible relapse of this practice. One ingredient of this approach was vesting the authority to issue the Charter in the Conference, a body that existed for only a few days. This, and the absence of an amendment clause, was intended to avert any subsequent watering-down of the Charter. It was expected to be implemented “as is” or to be abandoned in totality.

One final and very important point, under this heading had to do with the signal that the TPLF appeared to transmit to the

Oromo and other peoples of southern Ethiopia. To them the deliberation that they participated in and the pact that came out of it heralded the elevation of their status from that of subordinates to that of partners.

The Formation of a Joint Government

The concept of a joint government was introduced for the first time in the country's history. Participation in the Conference was not restricted to members of the group that captured the capital, but rather included a number of "Peace Loving and Democratic forces present in Ethiopian society and having Varied views."⁷ Although it was not—and under the circumstances perhaps could not be made to be—completely inclusive, the fact that forces "having Varied views" decided to jointly form and run a government is unprecedented in Ethiopia's history. For the first time since their forceful incorporation, the entitlement to the joint ownership of the country and its government by the Oromo and other oppressed southern nations, in particular, was explicitly acknowledged. Furthermore, it was hoped that this would launch a new kind of interaction between the concerned partners in which co-operation and competition were to be delicately balanced.

Restructuring the State Democratically

Contrary to practices common in Ethiopian history, the overthrown regime was not identified as the only source of injustice. Hence, the Dergue was described as "in essence, a continuation of previous regimes."⁸ Thus, the Charter alluded to targeting not only those injustices peculiar to the Dergue era but also to going beyond it to redress all injustices associated with all Ethiopian regimes. This was an indication that the entire political system and tradition were up for radical revision. More concretely, the end of "an era of subjugation and oppression" and the dawning of a period of "freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all peoples"⁹ was declared. To achieve this, "restructur[ing] the state democratically"¹⁰ was adopted as a policy. This is a very clear

indication of the parties' intention to go beyond the mere change of regime and to transform the very nature of the state.

The Reign of a Just Peace

All previous Ethiopian regimes tended to confuse the imposition of their will and the prevalence of peace and stability. According to the Charter, however, all "institutions of repression installed by previous regimes" to enforce such an unjust peace were to be abolished. Instead, basing "the reign of a just peace, on the proclamation of a democratic order" was declared "a categorical imperative."¹¹ Again, for the first time in the country's history, the clear linkage between justice, democracy, and peace was emphatically acknowledged. The justness of the armed struggle against the defunct regime underpinned this principle. Its obvious corollary, the justness of resistance against future undemocratic regimes by any means, was assumed to be self-evident.

After listing these four fundamental beliefs that, in my view, influenced the drafting of the Charter, I briefly recapitulated the main events between July 1991 and June 1992, that resulted in their systematic erosion. That summary of the transition's disappointing trend was attempted by showing TPLF unwillingness to abide by the spirit on which the pact to democratize Ethiopia was felt to be based. As such, it was good only for reaching hasty generalized conclusions and falls far short of carrying out a much more comprehensive stock-taking of the achievements and failures of the transitional period. To do the latter, it becomes necessary to first itemize just what was involved in the plan to effect a transition to democracy; which shall be attempted hereunder.

MULTIPLICITY OF TRANSITION

Few writers on recent Ethiopian politics have commented on the multiple nature of the transitional undertaking that was tabled at the July 1991 Conference. Among them, Pausewang states "the country is trying to perform a multiple transition; from dictatorship to democracy, from a centralized government to regional and

local administration, from a history of war to a state of peace."¹² Even the facets of the transition enumerated by this observer are numerous enough to indicate that quite a daunting task was being undertaken. In fact, aspects of the transition that was being attempted happened to be far more numerous.

As it is, even a single type of transition entails a considerable amount of risk. And of all kinds of transitions, political ones appear to be the most complex and fraught with more serious hazards. Undergoing any transition often demands changes in the physical setting, emotional frame, and manners of interactions. This is why many African societies accompany transitions with elaborate rituals and ceremonies. The pains, potential risks, and complications pertaining to the process are impressed on those undergoing the rites of passage. Those presiding over the ceremony are entrusted with the heavy responsibility of imbuing the experience with a lifetime significance, while guiding the participants through the exercise as painlessly as possible. African boys and girls thus are supposed to be transformed into responsible men and women by the experience of going through the elaborate rites of passage.

One can posit that the risks involved in undergoing a transition are directly proportional to the size of the gulf that is to be crossed. Landing short of the opposite bank can occur and can have dire consequences. Hence, in cases when bridging a wide gulf is being attempted, breaking the gap into manageable sizes and taking one move at a time may prove wise. Even in such situation, every step that is taken, every progress that is registered poses numerous challenges. Frequent fine-tuning of the process may be helpful to keep it on track. Determining what constitutes the decisive turning point and taking the proper navigational decisions to attain it is indispensable for the undertaking to be capped with success. The planners of the transition to multi-racial South Africa used the metaphor of a Rubicon to refer to such a point, beyond which a return to the status quo would prove at least unwieldy. In that relatively successful transition, and others like it, the concerned actors managed to patiently explore what constitutes the key hurdles.

Having done that, they then took every possible move with an eye on surmounting the identified obstacles.

Many have questioned, and most likely will continue to do so, the concerned parties' genuine commitment to honestly and seriously implement the Ethiopian transitional undertaking. Even if such an honest commitment did exist, the haste with which the Transitional Program came to be drawn up did not allow for a more comprehensive deliberation that would have helped to identify as many scenarios as possible. Many participants in the transition exercise started realizing its complexity mostly after the implementation effort began to run into one snag after another. The various components of the overall transition to democracy can now quite easily be enumerated with the advantage of hindsight. The following five aspects of the transition stick out as its most prominent dimensions:

The Political Aspect

The strictly political aspect of the transition is made up of two major components. Firstly, Ethiopia's deep-rooted autocratic political tradition was to be scrapped, paving the way for its replacement with a new, democratic one. Secondly, the Ethiopian state was targeted for a radical reconfiguration with a view to phasing out its imperial nature. This was to pave the way for the oppressed national groups to start exercising their rights to self-determination. (This component of the transitional undertaking will be the topic of Chapter 1 of this work.)

The Economic Aspect

The economic aspect of the transition was no less complex than the political one. The extent to which Ethiopia's economy was centralized during the reign of the Dergue has few, if any, parallels elsewhere in Africa. Going from a highly centralized economy to a liberalized and market-oriented one is a difficult and complex undertaking even under the best of circumstances. Attempting it while at the same time trying to redress the ill-effects of a devastating,

decades-long war compounded by recurrent droughts, as Ethiopia had to, was a staggering proposition.

The Administrative Aspect

The TPLF had formed its own Provisional Administration immediately after the Dergue's overthrow. It was this Administration that hosted the July 1991 Conference. One aspect of the transition thus came to involve replacing this TPLF Provisional Administration with the organs of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia.

Attitudinal Aspect

A high degree of mutual suspicion, distrust, and fear characterize interactions between Ethiopia's political forces. A similar condition applies to the peoples' encounter with the authorities, be it those already in power or those struggling to replace them. Unless a change in the direction of a gradually growing spirit of reciprocal trust and confidence is brought about, the success of transition to democracy did not appear quite promising.

The Role of Arms in Politics

In the political tradition of particularly northern Ethiopia, opposition to an incumbent regime always had to take on the form of an armed rebellion. The armed liberation fronts that succeeded in unseating the Dergue, hence, were formed as politico-military organizations from their very inception. For the transition to democracy to be capped with success, these had to shed their militaristic structures and styles of resolving political differences to be transformed into strictly civilian political parties. (Chapter 2 of this work focuses on the four sub-sections enumerated above.)

It should immediately be stated that the components to overall democracy, enumerated above, are intricately interrelated. Identifying the transition's various sides is done basically to assist the conceptualization of the process. These parts are so closely interwoven that failure in implementing one of them was likely to affect efforts being made in other areas. As will become clear later on,

the administrative aspect came to serve as the definitive turning point of the whole transition exercise. Making a more comprehensive accounting of the transition's achievements and failures in terms of the five categories listed above will be the subject of Part I of this work.

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Part I

THE MANY FACES OF ETHIOPIA'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Chapter 1

THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE TRANSITION

It was the strictly political aspect of the transition that drew the most attention both during the early period of the transition as well as later on. The tendency to be pre-occupied with the political aspect of the change is understandable in view of a previous experience, namely, the Dergue's land reform measure, which in itself was a step in the right direction. But failure to accompany this reform with the political changes that should have effectively empowered its beneficiaries left the door open for its abuse. Indeed its abuse turned it into a more rapacious system of exploitation of the resources and labor of the peasants, the supposed beneficiaries of the reform. Hence, in the hope of averting the repeat of such a possibility, participants in the post-Dergue transitional government tended to put more emphasis on the strictly political aspect of the transition. The extent to which the attention given to this aspect tended to overshadow the focus deserved by other components of the transition is unfortunate. The economic aspect of the transition, which was of almost as much significance, for instance, did not generate the kind of heated debate in the interim-legislature, the Council of Representatives (COR), as the political one did. The issue that in effect sealed the fate of the overall transition—its administrative aspect—was at best only indirectly

broached in the formal proceedings of the COR. The relatively comprehensive stock-taking that we will attempt in this work will go a long way towards making up for the one-sided focus that prevailed during the early period of the transition. We will start the cataloguing of achievements and failures by looking at the transition's political aspect. This had two components: (1) scrapping a tradition of autocracy, and (2) ending an imperial legacy. We will look at these two facets one after the other.

SCRAPPING AUTOCRACY IN FAVOR OF DEMOCRACY

The most widespread views about Ethiopian history, culture, and political tradition are those pertaining strictly to the northern or Abyssinian section of the present entity. Equating Abyssinian history, culture, and political tradition with that of the entire country is so well established that few authorities have recognized its one-sided nature. Lewis is one of the very few who does so recognize it: "As with many other aspects of behavior and culture, the standard view of Ethiopia is very often formed by the nature of society in the north—and is viewed from a northern perspective."¹ And he points out that the standard view about Ethiopian political tradition, while being applicable to the "powerful hierarchical and autocratic style of the Amhara, with their emperors, nobles and peasants,"² fails to embrace the more egalitarian political legacy of most southern societies. Recognizing present-day Ethiopia as the creation of "Christian highland rulers, largely through a process of political subjugation and economic exploitation of the outlying populations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries"³ is much more widespread now than was the case a few decades ago. One outcome of the conquest by these northern Christian highland rulers or Abyssinians was the extension of their traditional autocratic style of government over the peoples they subjugated. Seen in this context, the standard view of Ethiopian political tradition as being deeply autocratic is essentially correct. One should not, however, overlook the fact that it stands in contrast to the political tradition of the Oromos, Somalis, Sidamas, etc. The egalitarian nature of

these societies' political life prior to the conquest is also now widely acknowledged. Northern domination of the entire country's political life thus easily resulted also in subordinating the portrayal of all other peoples' history, culture and political tradition to that of the north.

At the time when it was extended over the whole of Ethiopia, Abyssinia's political system literally had the nature of a divine-right absolute monarchy. His predecessors' unassailable temporal political authority took on an additional dimension after the last emperor assumed also the role of being the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Emperor Haile Sellasie did introduce some cosmetic changes, basically to impress on his Western patrons his intentions to modernize his realm. In practice, however, the supremacy of the Crown and the status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the official state religion remained unaffected. Thus, the essentially medieval nature of Ethiopia's system of governance survived to the very end of the Emperor's reign.

The Emperor's attempt to thus put the new wine of modernity into the old wineskin of feudal order only helped to create an explosive mixture that went off in 1973 with disastrous consequences for himself and the entire country. In the immediate aftermath of his overthrow, the country did appear to be on the threshold of finally and genuinely entering the modern era. This period saw a relaxation of the suppression of freedom of expression resulting in the previously unprecedented appearance of independent journals. A hitherto unseen style of public self-expression also rose to a crescendo during this period. Workers, peasants, students, Moslems, government employees, and even monks staged often mammoth public demonstrations in support of, or in opposition to, issues about which they felt strongly.

Unfortunately, this period was short-lived because those who were being sucked into the power vacuum created by the collapse of the imperial government had a strong aversion to popular self-expression. The professional and traditional culture of the junior military officers who were being drawn into this power vacuum understandably influenced the tendency of putting more emphasis

on control than on the respect of liberties. Their civilian advisors also stuck to a similar stand primarily because of their adherence to a Marxist-Leninist ideology. Hence, these two forces joined together in averting the replacement of the emperor's autocratic system of rule with a genuinely democratic one. Instead, the traditional style of autocracy was replaced by an ideologically driven new form of authoritarianism. This is the situation that directly transposed Ethiopia's political system from an outmoded autocratic one to another that was apparently more current but turned out to be even more totalitarian and devastating. It is possible that the Marxist-Leninist rationale for instituting a new form of centralism and control did easily fit into the deep-seated autocratic political tradition of those who were rising to power. As one of its drafters, I saw the Transitional Period Charter as its signatories' preparedness to make a clean break with this undemocratic tradition and to genuinely carry out a transition to pluralist democracy.

Discussions about the undertaking to bring about such a transition to democracy raise the questions: What is democracy? And what constitutes a good democratic governance? For purposes of assessing the political aspect of the Ethiopian transition, we will rely on the criteria commonly employed by Western donor governments to attach a conditionality of "democracy" to the provision of economic assistance. Moore and Robinson list the following four criteria that donors apply as such a conditionality either separately or in combination: (i) respect of human rights, (ii) the existence of conducive conditions for genuine electoral competition, (iii) the reduction of military expenditure, and (iv) and the prevalence of transparency and accountability in public administration.⁴ Even Moore and Robinson recognize the imprecision of these tools for determining the prevalence, or not, of a democratic system of governance. Using some other criteria to gauge the degree of empathy between grassroots communities and the state authorities directly interacting with them would have been preferable to assess an administration's democratic nature. In the specific case of Ethiopia, such an alternative criterion would have been much more appropriate for one very important reason. In large parts of

the country, the prevailing alienation of the rulers from those they rule has always served as the unmistakable sign of the administration's undemocratic nature. Gauging the extent to which this hostile relation is replaced with a more relaxed one would have helped to indicate a more credible transition to a democratic order. Trying to formulate such an alternative analytical tool is beyond the scope of this undertaking. Hence, under the circumstances, it seems that we have to be satisfied with the criteria listed by Moore and Robinson. Using the criteria enumerated by these two authorities is useful for another reason. It was the Western governments, which attach these conditionalities in their dealings elsewhere, that played a considerable role in encouraging the adoption of a democratization agenda by the forces that came to power in Ethiopia in 1991. Some of them now seem to signal their endorsement of the TPLF's official view regarding the success of Ethiopia's transition to democracy. Applying the same set of criteria that these powers use to pressure other governments to uphold democratic liberties to the Ethiopian experience will enable us to determine the accuracy of their verdict. So, using the four criteria enumerated by Moore and Robinson to take stock of the achievements and failures of Ethiopia's effort to effect a transition to democracy turns out to be compelling.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Perhaps the one area where a radical departure from Ethiopia's past was greatly needed was in the area of respect for human rights. It appears that Ethiopian rulers considered violation of human rights as their natural prerogative, signifying the right to exercise unquestionable political authority. In their hierarchy of values, staying in power and holding the realm together appeared to normally outstrip concerns about the rights of people. The tendency to sacrifice the dignity of human beings on the altar of absolute political power attained unprecedented heights under the Dergue regime. Cases of abduction, torture, extra-judicial killing, and illegal detention of suspected dissidents attained staggering propor-

tions. The assumption that under certain conditions the commission of such grave human rights violations can be seen as laudable fomented a scramble to document one's "contributions." Thus, minutes, according to which perpetrators claimed more killings to their credit than officially accepted figures, are said to exist. Evidently, the most horrendous violations of human rights were carried out on such disturbingly righteous grounds. This experience could be taken as an indication of a prevailing ignorance about the content of international conventions concerning the principle of respect for human rights, the violation of which can have dire consequences.

On the other hand, Ethiopia, as one of a couple African countries that participated in the founding of the United Nations, is also one of the original signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The dissemination of the concepts enshrined in this document was, however, assiduously curtailed by the authorities. As a result, a very insignificant proportion of even the educated sector was aware of its very existence. Its translation into one of the languages of Ethiopia, in fact, took place only after the Dergue was overthrown. Civic education classes that could have exposed school children to the existence of this document or the principles espoused by it were, on the contrary, designed to serve a totally different purpose. Its aim during the imperial era was mainly to drum into the minds of youngsters the duty to pay unswerving allegiance to the Emperor and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The government's public information institutions also carried a similar responsibility. Under the Dergue this was replaced with a pre-occupation with the defense of the so-called Ethiopia's unity. Concerns about this "unity" came to surpass any considerations regarding the survival of a growing number of communities threatened by a combination of war and drought. Under a candidly declared policy of subordinating most of these other considerations to the survival of the Ethiopian state, respect for human rights was not even accorded the lip-service it gets from other authoritarian regimes.

The degree to which human rights were violated during the Dergue era is absolutely staggering. The lowest ranking public officials in the *kebeles* (neighborhoods) were given the freedom to carry out summary executions, resulting in hundreds of thousands being liquidated. Suspected dissidents were herded into overcrowded jails from which they were often taken out to be executed at the whim of even some of the guards. In the rural areas, many villages were air bombed, torched by troops, or forcibly relocated on the mere suspicion of having contacts with armed opposition groups. More people saw the inside of prisons during this period than at any other time, to such an extent that it has now become commonplace to hear two persons asking each other at which detention center they knew each other. This has replaced a previous habit of inquiring about the educational institution at which two learned persons first met.

The propaganda of the armed groups fighting the Dergue was replete with the most vociferous denunciation of the regime's human rights record. Hence, when they succeeded in unseating the Dergue, the expectation that they would take immediate measures to institute a high standard of respect for human rights ran very high. And indeed that is what, at least at the rhetorical level, seemed to happen. In the immediate aftermath of the Dergue's overthrow, TPLF/EPRDF officials were heard declaring their commitment "to the observance of and respect for basic human rights in general" and their "determination to abide by the provisions of all relevant international legal instruments pertaining to the observance of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms."⁵ This kind of public pronouncement paved the way for the formal adoption, at the July 1991 Conference, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the guiding principle of TGE's approach to governance. As a result, the first article of the Charter leaves no room for equivocation on the matter, as it reads: "Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, ...individual human rights shall be respected *fully, and without any limitation whatsoever*"⁶ (emphasis added). These rights were further elaborated as including:

- a. The freedom of conscience, expression, association and peaceable assembly and
- b. The right to engage in unrestricted political activity and to organize political parties, provided the exercise of such right does not infringe upon the rights of others.⁷

The transitional period thus started off with the expression of unmistakable commitment to the respect for human rights by those who were assembled to chart its course.

It is now possible to assess whether the same level of commitment to human rights has been carried over into the post-transition period. A cursory perusal of the 1994 Federal Constitution easily demonstrates that commitment to human rights declared at the conclusion of the transition is roughly comparable with that expressed at its beginning. Article 10 of the new Constitution reiterates a level of commitment to human rights comparable to that espoused by the Charter, as it declares:

1. Human rights and freedoms, emanating from the nature of mankind, are inviolable and inalienable.
2. Human and democratic rights of citizens and peoples shall be respected.⁸

This comparatively more terse expression of commitment to human rights and freedoms is further re-inforced by other articles. Article 9(4), for instance, states that "All international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land." One can deduce from this that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other similar conventions that Ethiopia has acceded to in the past have the full force of law. Hence, the 1994 Constitution's espousal of respect for human rights can even be seen as an improvement over the Charter that singled out the UDHR from the conventions to which the country has in the past acceded. Other articles of the Constitution prohibit such violations of human rights as arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Still

other provisions indicate a willingness to uphold the rights to freedom of religion, belief, opinion and expression, assembly and demonstration, association and movement. The rights of women and children, as special sectors of society, are affirmed in still other Articles of the Constitution.

Opposition groups tend to resort to broad arguments to reject this Constitution in its entirety. The most common basis for rejection concerns the process that led to its ratification. Almost all opposition groups condemn the process that led to its drafting and ratification as being exclusive and undemocratic. This basis of rejecting the Constitution has interfered with the possibility of scrutinizing its content. If it is subjected to such a scrutiny, it is possible to point to many shortcomings. One rare critic⁹ pointed out the absence of provisions for protection against "illegal search and seizure," that property rights have not been dealt with sufficiently, and that the "citizens' rights to bear arms" are not recognized. The same writer also criticized the omission of such novel legal concepts as banning trade in human organs.¹⁰ Such criticisms notwithstanding, few would reject the improvement registered by the Federal Constitution with respect to human rights by comparison with its predecessors. This relative improvement in fact brings to the fore a more important area of concern. This concern has to do with the practical implementation of the relevant articles of the Constitution. For many will question whether these high standards of respect for human rights will in fact be honored in the day-to-day administration of the country. Hagos voices such skepticism when he states: "We have witnessed repeatedly that the mere writing into national constitution human and democratic principles has never ensured the observance and respect of these principles by national governments."¹¹ At the time when the drafting of the Federal Constitution was under way, I anticipated that the "TPLF can afford to be quite generous on paper since it will not be bound by those aspects of any legislation that appear to restrain its freedom to act with impunity."¹²

Fears that provisions of the Federal Constitution dealing with respect for human rights may not be upheld in practice issue from

the experience of the transitional period. The Charter's adoption of the UDHR as the TGE's guidelines in the field of respect for human rights did not avert the violations of these rights by the TPLF. The commission of a massive and disturbing volume of serious human rights violations during the transitional period has been documented by both local and international human rights watchdog agencies.

Local human rights monitoring bodies are a novelty in Ethiopia. The few that are now engaged in monitoring the government's human rights performance came into existence only after the Dergue's overthrow. One of them, the Oromo-based *Gadado* (Agony), is doing a commendable work despite its clandestine style of assembling and disseminating information. Another, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC), has been at the center of serious controversy from its formation. This controversy concerns mostly the personality of its Chairman, Mesfin Woldemariam, whose outspoken denunciation of TPLF politics predates the formation of the EHRC. The Government on one basis or another routinely rejects reports of both groups. The most common one being the alleged partisan leanings of these groups. It is difficult to determine the extent to which their possible political leanings is proving prejudicial in these groups' declared objective of advocating respect for human rights. In the final analysis, their track record will be the ultimate litmus test of their reliability and dependability. Government crackdown or other forms of official obstruction of their work, on the other hand, can only complicate the process that would either earn them credibility or not.

The fledgling independent press is the other local source of information dealing with human rights violations. Reports of cases of disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and illegal detention regularly appeared in the local papers during the entire transition period and beyond. The professional quality of most of these papers admittedly does leave much to be desired. Speculations about their connection with one opposition group or another also cannot be rejected outright. Despite these factors, government rejection of their reports dealing with human rights violations as mere fabrica-

tions is not very convincing. The regular appearance of specific cases, in which names of victims and times and places where events occurred are detailed, makes their outright dismissal unconvincing. Even if a small percentage of them is confirmed, as it likely can be, there is reason enough to worry. It is the precedent of massive human rights violations of the transition period that is generating an understandable skepticism regarding the Government's willingness to abide by the Federal Constitution's provisions on the matter.

Because of the contentious nature of local reporting on human rights violations, we will depend mainly on the reports of eminent international human rights agencies for the purposes of carrying out this stock-taking exercise. In particular, we will extensively draw on the reports of Amnesty International (AI) and the American Association for International Commission of Jurists (AAICJ). These two agencies released their summary reports in April 1995, at the time when the official conclusion of the transitional period was approaching. They used that occasion to sum up the government's performance in the area of respect for human rights.

The emerging picture of the Government's human rights record turned out to be not very reassuring. The AI report starts out by underlining the Government's contradictory effort of trying officials of the previous regime for the same kinds of gross human rights violations that are being committed by itself. It minces no words when it states:

... the transitional period has also seen many new abuses of human rights. Thousands of suspected opponents of the Transitional Government have been detained without charge or trial in the past four years. Many have been released but several hundred are still held. Some are prisoners of conscience; some have been imprisoned after trials which appear to have been unfair. Dozens of suspected opponents of the government have 'disappeared' and many prisoners have been subjected to torture. A number of defenseless civilians have been shot dead by security forces.¹³

This opening general overview of performance during the four-year period was followed by detailed lists of cases of such human rights violations as illegal detention, disappearance, torture, and extra-judicial killing. The treatment meted out to members of the independent press was also dealt with in another section of the AI report. The arrest of over 100 journalists and publishers and the interrogation of an additional 20—in the period between October 1992 and April 1995 alone—are documented. Over 15 of these were fined, four of whom were jailed due to inability to pay the fine. The same report also documented the disappearance of two journalists.

As is common in the experience of many Third World countries, the fate of journalists seems to attract attention disproportionate to their numbers. This is partly due to the understandable tendency of considering their treatment as indicative of a government's policy to tolerate freedom of expression generally. In this sense, the Ethiopian government record for the transitional period leaves one in no doubt about its intolerant posture. Many other agencies have confirmed AI's reports on the mistreatment of journalists. The American Association for the Advancement of Science's Human Rights Network's Committee to Protect Journalists,¹⁴ for example, ranked Ethiopia second only to China in mistreating journalists. This agency's report contrasts the Ethiopian Government's daily practice with the principles enshrined in its Charter and other conventions of which it is a signatory. Even some Western government officials deplored the treatment meted out to journalists. US Congressman Harry Johnston, who masterminded an eleventh-hour attempt to mediate between the Ethiopian government and the opposition, openly criticized the detention of 12 journalists at the time of his mid-1995 visit to the country. He went on to conclude that Ethiopia has more political prisoners behind bars than the rest of Sub-Saharan African countries combined.¹⁵ His statement tallies with AI's previous documentation of the detention of tens of thousands of suspected opponents of the government.

Let us now turn our attention to the report of the second major

international human rights agency, the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists (AAICJ). This agency's criticism of the TGE's human rights record is no less scathing than that of the AI. This report too starts out with summary statements enumerating the following forms of human rights violations:

- a) imprisoning leaders and members of major political parties;
- b) refusing to allow opposition political parties to hold meetings outside Addis Ababa;
- c) refusing to allow opposition political parties access to the media controlled by the government;
- d) penalizing journalists under a vague press law;
- e) wrongfully restricting the Ethiopian Human Rights Council in April 1993 because of its reports criticizing the government, such as (i) the dismissal of 41 professors in April without proper cause, (ii) involvement in 'extrajudicial killing, torture, involuntary disappearance, arbitrary detention without charges,' etc.;
- f) refusing to recognize the fundamental human rights of all citizens in accordance with its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights referred to in the Transitional Government's Charter.¹⁶

The AAICJ joined the AI in depicting the deplorable consequences of government pressure on the independent press. The AAICJ report documented the arrest of some 107 journalists in the period between December 1994 and February 1995 alone. The consequences of the Government's "covert and overt restrictive measures" were the closure of 55 monthly journals and 51 other weekly publications.¹⁷ Increasing government restrictive measures that led to the disappearance of a growing number of independent publications clearly indicates a rising trend of suppression of freedom of expression in contravention of the principles enshrined in the Charter. Declarations of principle and their implementation thus stand opposed to each other. Scepticism regarding the enforcement of the Federal Constitution's provision dealing with

democratic liberties emanates from the precedent set during the transitional period. This is also why many have come to consider the scrutiny of the Constitution's content less important than the commitment to abide by publicly declared principles.

The volume of human rights violations catalogued by these eminent international human rights bodies is truly disturbing. One must realize that this is only a partial picture. Local and international human rights groups often find themselves in a position to report only on events occurring in the major towns and cities. This is due to a number of factors. Most of the educated persons who are directly or indirectly involved in reporting the occurrences of human rights violations are themselves almost strictly urban dwellers. The mistreatment experienced by one of their kind impacts on their feelings much more directly and hence is more likely to be reported. In addition, travel to the rural areas is often hazardous for any perceived critic of the Government, for the rural zealots of the ruling party have more room to act with impunity. Under a situation in which even visiting one's rural relatives is fraught with danger, openly speaking about the perpetration of human rights violations is unthinkable. Thus, a self re-inforcing situation is created: the ruling party's local officials will continue to act with impunity because of the certainty that their deeds are less likely to be exposed and censured, and those in a position to report on their misdeeds will remain reluctant to investigate and report on happenings in the rural areas because of this impunity. Consequently, figures of reported human rights violations include an insignificant proportion of those committed in rural areas. Once this is realized the picture becomes even more disturbing than is widely recognized. Occasional reports of rape, murder, and torture in rural areas reveal only the tip of the iceberg. A similar array of violations of human rights used to be committed by the troops of the former regime; nothing indicates that former TPLF troops, now Government soldiers, are behaving differently.

The TPLF-dominated Government has taken a number of steps to reverse the damages done to its public image by the reports of such eminent human rights agencies as Amnesty Interna-

tional and the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists. One such measure was to secure the services of international public relations agencies to rebut these reports. The International Transparency Commission On Africa—an Affiliate of Hadad International Lobby, an advocacy group apparently engaged by the Government—for example, chose to challenge the AI and AAICJ reports on the following grounds: (1) the information disseminated by these agencies is erroneous because it originates from opposition groups; (2) their questioning of the fairness of some verdicts of Government courts amounts to compromising the country's sovereignty; and (3) these agencies remained silent when the Dergue regime was perpetrating horrendous human rights violations.

Dismissing critical human rights reports as biased opposition propaganda is an approach commonly resorted to by offending governments and their public relations agencies. This diversionary tactic, however, has rarely been convincing to neutral observers. For the issue at stake is not really the source of the information, but its veracity. Governments would do themselves more good if they took the pains to investigate the reported cases of violations of human rights than to dismiss them wholesale as opposition fabrication. Taking necessary legal actions against perpetrators of confirmed cases of human rights violations would serve to improve their images both at home and abroad. Obviously, opposition groups tend to level exaggerated accusations against ruling parties. Yet, by comparison with the incumbent, they are the ones who have more interest in the protection of human rights. As a result, some of the cases reported by them would inevitably coincide with those disseminated by established international human rights groups as AI and AAICJ. It would have been preferable to investigate and deal with these cases than to squander the country's meager resources on the acquisition of the services of international lobby groups for the purpose of whitewashing them.

The accusation that reports by international human rights groups compromised Ethiopia's sovereignty is indeed strange coming—directly or indirectly—from the TPLF. The TPLF was a

major beneficiary of an unconventional humanitarian intervention that was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in total disregard of Ethiopia's sovereignty. This unique experience in humanitarian intervention, referred to as the Cross Border Operation, was made possible because of "a willingness by Western governments and the EC (i.e. European Commission), although not the UN, to quietly disregard Ethiopian sovereignty."¹⁸ This experience came to serve as one of the precedents that helped to shape an emerging post-Cold War development in which "the sovereignty norm of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations has been eroded in recent years as far as developing countries are concerned."¹⁹ The belief that "sovereignty is no longer an adequate excuse for a state to deny international access for humanitarian purposes" is a more direct consequence of the precedent set by the Cross Border Operation. In cases involving humanitarian or human rights considerations, this emerging trend in post-Cold War international relations is indeed welcome. The TPLF appeared to harbor such a conviction when it actively participated in the Cross Border Operation and did everything possible to popularize it both at home and abroad. It actively invited a growing number of foreign agencies to be involved in the "violation" of Ethiopian sovereignty in order to channel life-saving relief assistance to areas it was then administering. One cannot selectively invoke sovereignty. It is definitely wrong to encourage its violation when you are in opposition to the incumbent regime and then invoke it once you are ensconced in power. It is even more immoral to expect foreign agencies to save the lives of persons threatened by famine but to remain silent when state agents are seen murdering people rescued from the brink of death by the intervention of international relief agencies.

For the sake of this assessment, let us assume that some of the reporting of AI and AAICJ did, wittingly or unwittingly, infringe on Ethiopia's sovereignty. But can anyone accuse the UN also of insensitivity to the question of sovereignty? The UN's established practice is to scrupulously avoid any encroachment on the sovereignty of member states. This strict observance of the non-inter-

ference clause of its charter created a hesitation on the part of the UN to develop any kind of contact with the opposition groups in Ethiopia during the famines of the 1980s. As a result, UN input was clearly missing from the relief assistance that was then being channelled into TPLF-administered areas through the Cross Border Operation. The UN's traditional practice of subordinating other concerns to the respect of state sovereignty was what stood in the way of its involvement in the Cross Border Operation, as referred to above. At the time, this absence of UN participation was criticized by the TPLF and friends. Notwithstanding the UN's scrupulous adherence to the principle of respect of state sovereignty, a number of its organs have voiced strong criticism of the TPLF-dominated government's human rights record. (i) The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, (ii) the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, and (iii) the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, for instance, have all released reports critical of the government's human rights performance. The AI report gave a special emphasis to the reports of these UN agencies. Accordingly:

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances reported in December 1994 with regard to 70 disappearances under investigation that "no new information was received from the government of Ethiopia with regard to the outstanding cases." It concluded that it was "still unable to report on the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared persons."²⁰

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions reported in December 1994 that he had received no reply from the government to several communications expressing concern at the occurrence of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in Ethiopia. He called on the Transitional Government: "to ensure, with the same degree of determination as shown in the efforts to bring to justice those responsible for past

abuses, that allegations of human rights violations under the current authorities are subjected to exhaustive and impartial investigations, with a view to establishing the facts, determining those responsible and bringing them to justice, granting adequate compensation to the victims or their families, and to prevent the recurrence of such violations.”²¹

The report of another UN agency dealt with the extended detention of the officials of the former regime:

The UN Working Group on arbitrary detentions declared in December 1992 that the detentions were “arbitrary, being in contravention of articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR and Principles 2, 4, 9, 10, 32, 37, and 38 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment.” Having received no reply from the Ethiopian government to contest this, it requested the government to “take the necessary steps to remedy the situation, so as to comply with the provisions and principles incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the ICCPR. This point was reiterated by the Working Group twice in 1993 and again in December 1994.”²²

These UN bodies released their reports as part of discharging the mission entrusted to them by member states. Hence, their criticism cannot in any manner be interpreted as an infringement on Ethiopia’s sovereignty. In fact, accusing other agencies that drew on these reports of violating Ethiopian sovereignty can amount to an indirect attack on these UN organs.

The government advocate’s third approach to diminishing the impact of the AI’s and AAICJ’s quite damning report is based on these agencies’ alleged silence when the previous regime was committing horrendous human rights violations. Whether these agencies did indeed fail to report the Dergue’s violation of human

rights or not can easily be verified from the records. What is surprising is the speed with which the TPLF has come to sound just like the regime that it unseated with heavy sacrifices. For the Dergue, too, often used the same accusation of silence during the reign of its predecessor to deflect criticisms of its human rights violations. In a statement released on July 1, 1977, for example, the Dergue railed against the US Government for protesting its violations of human rights because the "USA had never referred to these rights when the Emperor Haile Selassie's Government had been 'decimating thousands of oppressed Ethiopian people.'"²³

Ethiopian regimes, one after the other, have pointed to their predecessor's violations of human rights to divert attention from those they themselves are committing. The harshness of Fascist Italy's brief rule was continuously played up by Emperor Haile Sellasie's regime to cast a shadow over the daily reality of growing injustice under his reign. The Dergue repeatedly contrasted the purported liberatory objective of its administration with that of its predecessor that was often referred to as the "man-eating" feudal order. Ethiopian peasants, in particular, were being asked to appreciate their supposedly improved status even after the exaction of resources by the new regime had surpassed that of its predecessor by many fold. Even more surprisingly, measuring the Dergue's subsequent human rights performance against the events that took place at the height of the 1977/78 Red Terror was often practiced in the 1980s. Thus, the statement "there is no Red Terror any more" was often heard as a demonstration of a growing "respect of human rights" by the Dergue. The TPLF and its friends also often use the massive violations of human rights committed during the Dergue era as a yardstick by which to measure improvements in human rights under the new government.

Using a preceding government's record of brutality and criminality as the yardstick whereby to measure improvements in the area of respect for human rights should be categorically rejected. Instead, adherence to the high standards of respect for human rights enshrined in numerous international conventions and written into the country's laws beginning in 1991 should be insisted

upon. American Congressman Harry Johnston takes such a line when he states: “The Ethiopians and in some cases, the State Department, use the Mengistu regime as a benchmark to determine human rights progress. I don’t think you can use that any more. I think with the Meles regime being in power now for four years, I use the benchmark of what progress has been made in the last two years.”²⁴ Even TPLF’s close friend, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, advised that TPLF leaders should be held accountable on the basis of their declared principles and not merely on improvements registered over that of the Dergue era.

The achievement or failure of the TPLF-dominated government on the question of respect for human rights has been evaluated on the basis of data assembled by eminent international watchdog agencies. Due to these agencies’ established practice of publishing only those cases of human rights violations that they are able to confirm, the data assembled by them can only be taken as indicative of a more serious situation. Data compiled by people much more intimately involved in monitoring Ethiopia, suggests that AI and AAICJ reports indeed constitute no more than the tip of the iceberg.

The UK-based Oromia Support Group, whose top officials are mainly British nationals, has documented from local papers, personal correspondences, and AI reports the following cases of human rights violations for the period between late 1993 and mid-1997 alone: 1,683 extra-judicial killings, 527 disappearances and “scores of thousands” of detentions.²⁵ As explained above, even these figures have to do mostly with events in towns and cities. Getting information from rural areas is difficult, as has already been explained. And if cases of human rights violations in the rural areas were included, these figures could easily soar to staggering proportions. The picture we are left with, even omitting incidents in the rural areas and halving the assembled data, is disturbing enough.

The government that is responsible for these gross human rights violations happens to be the first to repeat an event that took place

at the end of the Second World War. It has become the first African government to prosecute officials of the regime that it overthrew for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The absurdity of this situation is compounded by another that is no less striking. The former officials that it is trying were evidently convinced that they were doing something laudable when they engaged in the perpetration of gross human rights violations. In their warped value system, eliminating the “enemies of the revolution and Ethiopia’s unity” was considered a creditable activity. Hence, each one of them apparently eagerly documented his/her role in the commission of the crimes for which he/she is now standing trial. That documentation is currently providing the bulk of the information entered as evidence to prove their culpability. Although the trial of these officials is to be supported, its negative side-effects should not be overlooked. Henceforth, regimes will take extra care not only to avoid documenting cases of human rights violations, but to even destroy all information pertaining to them. In addition, the execution of activities with possible human rights implications will be done in secrecy. Forming secret death squads to carry out the elimination of suspected opponents of the government and holding others in secret detention centers will become the trend. Already information about the existence of secret detention sites, commonly referred to as “Bermudas,” is in circulation. The most notorious secret detention centers are said to be located in Tigray, a region almost completely closed to casual visits by non-Tigrayan Ethiopians. The only first-hand experience about conditions in these secret detention centers in Tigray that I have heard comes from a Sudanese that used to be employed by the Oromo Relief Association as a driver. He was abducted from the border town of Kurmuk in 1993 and was held for some time in one of these prisons. He later related a story of nightly actual and mock executions in these sites during his stay. He was subjected to several mock executions himself in order to persuade him to confess to being an OLF agent. Only the good relations that then existed between the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments resulted in his release based on the appeals lodged by members of his family.

Attempts are often made to justify these TPLF violations of human rights on a number of grounds. The most prominent of these justifications is the existence of a state of war with some of the opposition groups.²⁶ War with the OLF is regularly cited as the root cause for human rights violations especially in Oromia. Two issues come to the surface when resort is made to this rationale. Firstly, cases of politically motivated detention and liquidation of Oromos predates the resumption of full-scale fighting between the TPLF and OLF in the latter part of June 1992. Foreign observers of the June 1992 district and regional elections were able to confirm the existence of Oromo political detainees directly from TPLF prison records. In one prison, observers saw 27 names listed under the heading "political prisoners."²⁷ The NDI report on said elections states: "In Sire, which is located near Nekemte in Region 4, 32 people were arrested on June 15 for agitating 'against the OPDO' (the Oromo wing of the TPLF). Based on conversations with local leaders and visits to prisons, observers in several regions concluded that charges of politically motivated arrests were credible; in other regions, the allegations could not be corroborated."²⁸ One can convincingly argue that it is this kind of violations of human and democratic rights that actually fomented a climate of war, and not the other way round.

Secondly, even those societies whose leaders have not entertained a violent response to TPLF aggression are not spared the violation of their human rights. The political leaders of such peoples as the Sidama, Gedeo, Hadiya, Walayita, etc. have never espoused and are not known to be engaged in armed struggle. Yet cases of detention and extrajudicial killing are reported to occur in the home areas of these peoples, too. A news item broadcast by the BBC on 15 February 1995, for example, reported 13 cases of arrest and torture of persons residing in the region inhabited by the above communities. Those detained were reportedly interrogated about supposed links with "bandits." And finally, if the existence of a state of war in any way justifies the perpetration of human rights violations, then the officials of the former regime should not be put on trial nor should other governments who are facing insurgency,

such as that of neighboring Sudan, be criticized for violating the human rights of communities known to be involved in armed struggle against them.

The transitional period was ushered in with high hopes for an improvement in the area of respect for human rights. Initial TPLF declarations were very encouraging. This was followed by the decisions of the July 1991 Conference, which formally committed the TPLF (and those that it invited) to abide by the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The information that we assembled above, however, clearly demonstrates TPLF unwillingness to abide by the decision of the Conference that it hosted. A growing gulf thus developed between its pronouncements and actual practice. And a growing respect for human rights is generally considered a key ingredient in bringing about a transition to democracy. In the specific case of Ethiopia, its need is even more glaring. By the accounting that we made above, the transition has therefore been a disappointing failure with regard to respect for human rights. This is what makes the inclusion of references to human rights in the Federal Constitution of doubtful consequence. Many will remain convinced that its realization in the daily work of administration is not promising.

COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

Moore and Robinson list the existence of conducive conditions for electoral competition as the second criterion for determining the prevalence of democracy. The existence of a close relationship between this condition and respect for human rights is of course quite obvious. Expecting electoral competition to exist in an atmosphere marred with violations of human rights is clearly futile. And a non-competitive election is a contradiction in terms. For democracy, in the final analysis, is about having a choice. Thus, the Norwegian Observers of the May 1995 election in Ethiopia concur with this opinion when they write in their report that "if one alternative is held up as the only loyal one while other alternatives are suppressed, prohibited or silenced, the debate is not in-

clusive—and then the elections are meaningless.”²⁹ It is hard to disagree with their recommendation that “under such circumstances it is better to hold no elections at all than to discredit them as a tool for democracy, thereby discrediting democracy in the people’s minds.”³⁰ We will hereunder document the stages by which Ethiopian politics of the transitional period began by espousing the opposite of the exclusivism so aptly identified by the Norwegian observers.

The transitional period definitely did take off by signalling the dawning of a new pluralist era in Ethiopia’s political history. The July 1991 Conference was conceived as a forum embracing “peace loving and democratic forces present in Ethiopian society *and having varied views*”³¹ (emphasis added). In as much as joining each other to form and run a government despite “having varied views” is the ultimate in pluralist democracy, the participants’ original expression of commitment to it is unmistakable. Over twenty organizations became party to the Charter that served as the basis of the TGE. Implementing the Charter’s Transitional Program was expected to, in stages, institutionalize this initial plurality. Involving the public in the rehearsal of pluralist politics was also part of the plan to move in a democratic direction. The first major step to put the Charter’s principles of plurality into practice was the district and regional elections of June 21, 1992. The fact that over 60 participating organizations registered to compete in these first series of elections indicated that the process was still on track.

Unfortunately, events surrounding these elections not only threw the process off-track, but also came to serve as the high watermark of pluralism in the politics of the transitional period. Instead of moving in the direction of a widening involvement, even participation in the TGE suffered a dramatic set-back when some participants were forced to withdraw as a result of disillusionment over the handling of the elections. Participation in the TGE continued to plummet when other groups were subsequently expelled merely for attending a conference organized by those already outside the system. Many observers point to this event as the moment when the government’s base started to get increasingly narrower. Writ-

ing in 1994, I concluded that "The joint nature of the Transitional Government has continuously been eroded to such an extent to render it non-existent. Bona fide TPLF representation in the Council of Representatives has risen from the original 37% to more than 51% due to expulsions and voluntary departures of the frustrated delegates of other organizations."³² The June 1992 district and regional elections that triggered this dramatic reversal of plurality was itself preceded by another that, in comparison, has attracted much less attention. On the other hand, this so-called "snap election" of May 1992 was actually the more determinant trend-setter.

Ethiopia witnessed a total of five elections during the transition, including the above two. The most competitive of all of them—and thus the one marred by the most naked form of interference—was the very first one, i.e., the "snap election." This initial crude election was conducted in order to pave the way for the subsequent and critical district and regional elections of June 21, 1992. What it actually succeeded in doing was to demonstrate to the "EPRDF (i.e., TPLF) that it lacked genuine support in certain regions."³³ Prior to this revelation, TPLF leaders appeared certain that their role in ending the Dergue's atrocious rule will be acknowledged by the electorate overwhelmingly voting in their favor. Once they realized that this was not to happen, they started resorting to all sorts of means—few of them legal—to produce a landslide electoral victory for themselves. Thus, the "snap election" served as an opportunity to test the level of their organization's popularity and the subsequent district and regional elections was made to produce a result closer to their ambition. In the process of doing so they ended up treating the voters in a manner reminiscent of the Dergue period. Thus, many voters, "especially those in areas where EPRDF (i.e., TPLF) conflicts with other parties were most intense, experienced little difference between the June 21 elections and the one-party elections conducted during the Mengistu era."³⁴ Experiences during the three elections that followed only helped to entrench the absence of plurality that manifested itself during the preceding two. As more and more parties

found the atmosphere too hostile, the number of those who opted out of the process increased.

The same reduction of participation by independents was also witnessed during the period. In the first series of elections there was not much need for independents to stand for office as there were many parties to choose from. By the third election (the June 1994 Constituent Assembly Election), however, the number of participating parties had grown so low that standing as an independent was increasingly resorted to as an alternative avenue for involvement in the electoral process. Some of these may have been closet TPLF members, as was commonly suspected. Yet, it is conceivable that most were not. One thing is undeniable: participation by independent candidates, despite misgivings about the system's fairness, helped to inject a certain amount of pluralism into a process that was fast becoming a strictly one-party affair. That some of them did actually manage to get elected was an indication that the political space, at that stage, was open enough to harbor non-TPLF elements. Circumstantial evidence shows that few of those elected were supporters of the TPLF, as commonly speculated. In areas where TPLF administration lasted the longest, such as regions 1 and 3, no independents contested the third election at all. In contrast, many independents challenged TPLF candidates in areas where its presence was more recent and its popularity was at least questionable. Had the TPLF chosen to put up bogus independent candidates to portray a picture of plurality, it is not conceivable for it to neglect doing so also in areas with which it has a longer period of association. The more likely reason for the absence of independent candidates in these areas is the presence of TPLF's pervasive control that served as a disincentive to non-TPLF potential candidates.

The biggest concentration of independent candidates happened to be in a region where TPLF's unpopularity was certain. It was also a region where TPLF personnel's practice of applying pressure on potential candidates and the electorate was relatively constrained. This region was the capital, or Region 14 as it was known then. Even the most ardent supporters of the TPLF cannot deny

its relative unpopularity among a large section of the capital's population. The capital being the seat of many diplomatic missions, TPLF operatives had to exercise maximum circumspection to avoid the detection of their high-handed treatment of the electorate and potential independent opponents. These factors, taken together, resulted in 9 of the 23 seats allocated for the capital being captured by independents in the 1994 election. The number of independent candidates who stood for office in the key Oromia Region was also large, although few managed to get elected. The number of independents who contested this election indicates the existence of a trend. The number of independent candidates corresponded with the degree to which TPLF control was entrenched. In areas where such control was total, few independents chose to stand for office, contrary to the situation in the capital and Oromia Region. In other cases, the TPLF at that time was not in a hurry to extend its total control. Regions 12 and 13 fall in this category, where up to a third of the seats going to independents did not at that stage seem to bother the TPLF. This situation of course underwent a radical change after TPLF control in the more key regions was assured: then extending the same kind of control over these peripheral areas was pursued with vigor.

All in all, a total of 26 independents were elected in the June 1994 Constituent Assembly election. Comparing the number of candidates that stood with those that actually got elected is indicative of the kind of obstacles faced by the independents. In fact, there were fewer party candidates (534—most of them belonging to the TPLF) than independents (936). But while only 3% of the independents succeeded in getting elected, 92% of those put up by the TPLF did so.³⁵ The constriction of the political space that produced this lopsided result continued to worsen with each election. In the final (May 1995) election, "only three seats were won by non-EPRDF candidates" out of a total of more than 900; a ratio of less than 0.3%. Out of a total of 372 independents that competed, only two got elected, further reducing the independent success rate to 0.5% from the already very low 3% in the preceding election. No more proof is needed to demonstrate how the

system gradually closed up, making room for competition non-existent by the time of the last election. The opposition parties' belief that "standing for elections under the prevailing conditions was futile" was practically confirmed by the negative experience of independents. In addition, it is also likely that the TPLF drew lessons from the preceding elections and did everything possible to further reduce the possibility of independents getting elected.

There is often a tendency to blame the opposition for the growing absence of competition in the elections of the transition period. They are held responsible for either boycotting the elections altogether or withdrawing at the last minute. This view overlooks the fact that not all of them chose to do so. There were parties that continued to give the process the benefit of the doubt up to the last election (May 1995). The Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP), for example, fielded a total of 85 candidates in this election but failed to capture more than a single seat. Anybody who is fairly acquainted with the country's political mood cannot honestly explain this poor showing on the party's relative unpopularity in comparison to the TPLF. There was indeed a considerable amount of speculation prior to the election that it would capture at least a few urban seats, where rejection of the TPLF and its style of politics is widely known to be unpopular. The ENDP's total defeat was indicative, more than anything else, of the fact that structures and practices that pre-empt competition had been put in place during the previous elections. Its humiliating defeat only helped to make it the laughing stock of those who boycotted the election on the conviction that participation was futile. ENDP's experience only confirmed them in their original belief. A slightly better performance by the ENDP would have, on the other hand, had the direct opposite impact of sowing the seeds of doubt in the minds of the boycotters.

Few would contest the absence of competition during the May 1995 election. The verdict of one group of foreign observers on the lack of competition during this election is unmistakably clear. "The Norwegian Observer Group, however, dismisses these elections as 'neither fair, free nor impartial' for several reasons. Firstly,

the elections cannot be considered competitive, hence it is difficult to assess whether the new government has such a relatively broad-based support as the election results reflect.”³⁶ Thus, the transition period got off with the participation of more than twenty organizations that grew to more than 60 in the June 1992 elections. It closed with just one non-TPLF party putting up a futile competition. Even the ENDP’s freedom of movement was so circumscribed that its futile participation had no impact on the general conclusion that the last election was non-competitive.

Already by the time of the June 1992 elections, the National Democratic Institute was drawing parallels between the emerging electoral practice of the transitional period with that of the Dergue era, as has been cited above. There are several aspects to this similarity, the absence of competition being the major one. Both during the elections of the Dergue years and those of the transitional period, opposition groups boycotted the elections and asked their supporters to stay away from polling stations. Hence, voter turn-out became an indicator of support for the opposition in both experiences. The ruling parties thus had to produce as large a turn-out as possible in order to demonstrate absence of support for the opposition. And a number of coercive measures were resorted to in order to achieve this desired result. The outcome was the conversion of the right to vote into the duty to do so. This was clearly the case during the last election of the transitional period, as witnessed by the Norwegian Observer Group: “In many places the peasants felt obliged to participate in the election and vote for the government parties, to avoid repercussions from the power holders.”³⁷ The pre-determined nature of the election’s outcome was also very obvious to these peasants as witnessed by an old man in Axum, Tigray Region, who said “we know who will be elected.”³⁸ To these peasants voting for the government’s candidate became a duty, just like paying taxes.

The exercise of voting is not as totally unknown in Ethiopia as many western commentators tend to state. Leaving the deep-seated democratic culture of some southern communities aside, elections used to be conducted periodically during the reign of Emperor

Haile Sellasie. Clearly, election to the Emperor's rubber stamp parliament did not have much actual political significance. In addition, the Emperor's Constitution did not allow the formation of political parties. That does not mean, however, that the elections were not competitive. In fact, over time, some sort of election fever started to accompany the quadrennial affair. Of all of them, the last election held under the Emperor was quite competitive between individual candidates. This last election was held between June 23 and July 7, 1973 with some 1,500 candidates contesting the 250 seats of the Chamber of Deputies.³⁹ The strictly symbolic nature of the parliament aside, there were many undemocratic features of the electoral practice of the time. Having property of a minimum value of 1,000 Birr and being at least 25 years old, which barred more than 80% of the population from competing, were some of the glaring undemocratic features of the electoral system. However, in at least two aspects the electioneering of the Emperor's era was a more meaningful rehearsal of democracy than the exercise that took place during the following two governments. Firstly, there was no observable coercion by the Emperor's government—or the need for it—to produce a large voter turn-out. Secondly, there was much more competition between the individual candidates. Persuading the electorate to show up at the polling station and to cast a favorable vote was left to the competing individual candidates. In this respect, the electoral practice of the Emperor's years had more of the features of a real election than what emerged during the rule of his successors. For members of the generation that reached maturity disparaging the anachronism of the Emperor's style of rule, this conclusion is quite a bitter pill to swallow.

To most members of that generation, the Emperor's style of rule was so out-dated that any regression was considered inconceivable. The atrocities and devastation that took place during the era of the Dergue practically demonstrated that such a regression was possible. The Dergue's successors came to power signalling a willingness to make a clean break with the political tradition of both the Emperor and the Dergue. Their early pronouncements

and practical measures appeared to demonstrate their determination to succeed in doing so. They invited other parties to join them in forming and leading the Transitional Government. They scheduled elections that initially were contested by many parties. Unfortunately, their unwillingness to even partially lose an election came to the fore in the very first election. Thereafter, they took policy decisions that gradually curtailed competition, resulting in its total absence in the last one. Thus, on this count as well, the transition to democracy was a disappointing failure.

LOW MILITARY EXPENDITURE

The third criterion for determining the prevalence of a democratic order, according to Moore and Robinson, is a government's ability and willingness to reduce its military expenditure. This criterion is especially appropriate for assessing the existence of democratic conditions in developing countries for a number of reasons. In most such countries, the security and military machinery is strengthened, more often than not, to muzzle, intimidate, and contain internal dissension. In addition, expenditure on the military and security is usually made at the expense of alleviating the abject poverty of most of the citizens, thus further fuelling the very discontent that it is supposed to contain. Such a misplacement of priority existed in the Ethiopia of the Dergue years to an extent rarely seen elsewhere. Even after the only credible external threat posed by Somalia became virtually non-existent, Ethiopia's military expenses continued to rise, attaining unprecedented proportions. "By 1991 it was absorbing 15% of GDP, over half government expenditure and generating an estimated \$4bn–\$8bn debt to the former Soviet Union."⁴⁰ At the same time, the peoples' impoverishment increased both intensively and extensively, surpassing many fold what it was even under the Emperor.

There was thus a high expectation that the end of the Dergue era and the resultant demobilization of close to half a million of its troops will immediately result in a dramatic reduction of military expenditure. Establishing with certainty whether that has indeed

been the case is not easy because governments have the habit of hiding their total expenditure on military and security concerns. Earlier observer comments on this topic were not very favorable. For example, the writers of the NDI Report state: "Real military expenditures dropped only a few percentage points."⁴¹ Official figures released after this observation was made indicate some improvement. Still, this improvement is in relation to the condition that prevailed during the last years of Dergue rule. During the last couple of the Dergue years, defense share of total government expenditure hovered around the 40% mark. According to some sources, this dropped to 17% in the first year of the transition, continuing to drop to 12% and 8% in the financial years 92/93 and 93/94, respectively.⁴² Statements by government officials seemed to indicate that the savings from this reduced military expenditure were channelled to such essential human development activities as education. In a joint press conference on September 7, 1993, the minister of education and the vice-minister of defense announced that the defense budget had been cut by 56% from what it had been during the Dergue era while that of education had gone up by 52.11%.⁴³ Such a redirection of financial resources, if verified, is to be commended.

Using the situation that prevailed under the Dergue as the yardstick to measure reduction in defense budget, however, is not quite satisfactory. The Dergue army numbered close to half a million men. Merely going from this bloated figure to TPLF's estimated number of 100,000 troops does not demonstrate a growing stabilization that a reduced military expenditure is supposed to indicate. Again, the more appropriate yardstick would be the extent to which the TPLF reduced the number of its own troops as a reflection of the confidence that should have accrued from its officially declared electoral popularity. The TPLF had a total of 15 divisions, out of which 11 were strictly made up of Tigreans, at the time it came to power. According to the report of one group of foreign observers, TPLF troop size remained at this level up to the time of the May 1995 election.⁴⁴ Seen in this light, the

officially reported reduction in defense expenditure does not deserve much praise.

The basis on which Ethiopia's military expenditure should be determined can be controversial. However, the following three considerations appear inevitable when addressing the issue. Firstly, because of the prevailing massive poverty of the peoples, investment in social and economic development should definitely be given maximum priority. Secondly, existing regional threats to the country's stability should be taken into account. And with the disintegration of Somalia the only foreign force that used to pose a direct threat, and hence justified having a large military establishment, has disappeared. Eritrea's independence coupled with the prevailing good relations between Finfinne (Addis Ababa) and Asmara has also removed the other rationale for keeping a large armed force. (This has, of course, undergone radical change since the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May 1998.) The third and by far the most important consideration has to do with the political climate prevailing in the remainder of the country. If the country's political system is put on a course of increasing democracy, then the sectors of the society that will find armed opposition increasingly unwarranted will accordingly expand. This will automatically reduce the need for keeping a large military and security machinery with the purpose of containing internal upheavals, as was the case under previous regimes. When the creation of such an inclusive atmosphere was still being entertained, continuously reducing the size of Ethiopia's armed forces was often discussed in general terms between the TPLF and OLF. There was a general consensus to maintain only a small but efficient army and air force. Recent information indicates that the move is in the opposite direction due to the apparent continued instability of the internal political space.

In addition to reducing its size to a more affordable size, the composition of Ethiopia's post-Dergue army came to figure in the attempt to bring about democratic change. The Dergue's armed forces had to be demobilized for a number of reasons. The major reason was its over-politicization and close integration with the

Workers Party of Ethiopia. TPLF troops that were, on an interim basis, adopted as the country's defense force could not be considered as the kernel of a permanent army mainly for the same reason. The partisan nature of TPLF troops was even more obvious than that of the Dergue. Even worse, the TPLF army was made up mostly of Tigreans, with 11 of its 15 divisions being strictly Tigrinya speakers, as has already been stated. Hence, these troops' partisanship has both political and ethnic dimensions. In contrast, the ethnic content of the Dergue army did not have such a level of imbalance. When the TPLF's obviously partisan army was adopted as a temporary defense force, it was hoped that replacing it with a less partisan one would be tackled in due course. But its direct interference in the critical June 1992 elections made its replacement with a more non-partisan army much more urgent than was originally envisaged. Hence, during the negotiations between the OLF and TPLF in Asmara in late 1992, the OLF insisted that the program of creating an alternative non-partisan army be carried forward. OLF delegates produced several alternative plans to realize this aim within as short a time as possible. To TPLF representatives, disarming all non-TPLF troops appeared as the more important priority over genuinely addressing the creation of a non-partisan army. Hence, neither the TPLF nor the facilitators of the negotiations paid much attention to the alternatives presented by the OLF.

A few days after the end of those negotiations, however, a statement by the then minister of defense, Siyye Abraha, was broadcast by the Government's Amharic radio program, in which he announced that preparations were under way to establish a defense force "representing all the nations and nationalities of the country."⁴⁵ He is said to have "stressed that the structure of a defence force, most of whose members belonged to a single nationality should not continue in the future." Thus, he announced that "there would be a national defence recruitment process to embrace all nations and nationalities." How much of this program was actually implemented in the following years is obvious from the fact that out of a total of 15 divisions 11 still remained

Tigrean up to the May 1995 election. But mere diversification of the army's composition is secondary to the manner of recruiting, training, and indoctrinating an army. The presence of Oromos, Tigreans, and Eritreans in the Dergue's army did not spare these communities from its atrocities. A more credible approach to creating a genuinely non-partisan army would have been through the creation of an all-party commission to design a program for its recruitment, training, and indoctrination. So long as such a step is not taken, members of other communities will continue to view the present army as a defender of Tigrean hegemony whether its composition is further diversified or not.

By the time of its overthrow, the Dergue was in the midst of a feverish activity to acquire an arms-manufacturing capacity. Some of the factories that it had acquired were in the process of becoming operational when it was overthrown. The fate of these plants was never formally discussed in the TGE's interim-legislature, the Council of Representatives. In casual discussions between the officials of the TPLF and OLF, converting most of the arms-producing factories into plants for the production of civilian items was agreed upon. This plan seemed to survive up to 1993, when Vice-minister of Defence, Girma Biru, announced that "a plan was being drawn up to convert parts of the arms and ammunition factories into non-military production plants in a bid to back up the national economy... Asked whether the country's military factories were presently producing arms, the official said that there was no arms production at the moment except in a single plant, which is engaged in the production of ammunition in small quantities."⁴⁶ How much of this plan was actually implemented is hard to find out. Information subsequently disseminated by some of the country's newspapers, however, seems to indicate the continued engagement of these plants in the production of military items.

The successors of the Dergue government were expected to reap a windfall of good will, particularly from the country's peasantry as a result of two major policy changes. To quote the Norwegian Observer Report : "Firstly, unlike the Dergue regime, the EPRDF has so far implemented a policy of economic liberalisation

with very positive effect for the peasantry. No longer do the peasants have to 'sell' their crops to government buyers at fixed prices. They are free to sell at the highest price on the market. And secondly, unlike during the Dergue, peasants are not forced to give their children to the use of the military in wars."⁴⁷ Of the two peasant changes of the post-Dergue era, the one concerning economic liberalization, may survive for a little longer because it fits the kinds of policy changes demanded by western governments and financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. The second one, conscription of rural youths into the army, seems to have already suffered a reversal. According to reports appearing in some independent newspapers, government agents have started pressuring peasant families to turn over their sons for military training.⁴⁸ If confirmed, this is yet another indication of the TPLF wittingly or unwittingly following in the footsteps of its predecessor. Much more importantly, it is an unmistakable signal that the internal political climate is not moving in the direction of growing stability.

In comparison with the preceding two criteria for assessing the prevalence of democracy, the post-Dergue government seems to deserve better marks for its reduced military expenditure. But recognizing that this reduction is relative to the high levels that it had attained in the last years of the Dergue reduces the significance of the government's achievement in this area. At the same time, this criterion and the previous ones are intimately intertwined. A confident government will respect the human rights of citizens and will be much more tolerant of those wishing to challenge it at the polls. And such a government can afford to significantly reduce its defense expenses, as it wishes to base its popularity more on persuasion than coercion. On the other hand, a growing violation of human rights and obstruction of the activities of legal opposition can only fuel more discontent and rising violence. Seen in this light, it is possible that, unless a major political change takes place, Ethiopia's military expenditure will once again continue to soar.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Moore and Robinson admit that their fourth criterion for evaluating the prevalence of democracy and good governance is the most diffuse. This criterion, practices and procedures of government, is a loose phrase pertaining to two items: the first is a ruling party's willingness and ability to formulate clear regulations for carrying out its administrative activities and abiding by them; the second is its preparedness to be open to investigation by public bodies. Moore and Robinson summarized the above two interlocking criteria by naming them transparency and accountability. Because of their much more subjective nature, using this set of criteria as a tool for assessing the achievement or failure of the transition is a much more difficult undertaking. Hence, we will make only a few general remarks.

As will be elaborated in a later section, secrecy pervades almost all aspects of TPLF behavior. This pervasive secretiveness results from two factors. Firstly, in the social milieu from which the TPLF emerged, secretiveness is a deep-seated way of life. Secondly, this was further augmented in the TPLF because of the lessons that it drew from the teachings of Lenin as we will expound on later. And it is inevitable for this Tigrean and TPLF culture to influence the style of operation of the government over which members of this party and ethnic group are presiding. As a result, it is not likely that we will see much transparency being practiced by the present government. The TPLF government's refusal to have any dealings with the local independent media is an obvious indication of its reluctance to expose itself to questioning.

A political economy of corruption has always been a part of government in Ethiopian. The core of this economy is keeping regulations as vague as possible. A person seeking the service or decision of a government official or institution rarely knows just where to begin. Even finding the necessary forms for submitting an application is often a very formidable undertaking. Arranging to meet an official dealing with one's case is frequently even more

impossible. All this builds up to one condition: to have one's case processed one needs to know somebody, or at least know somebody who knows somebody else. Greasing the hand inevitably figures in this search for connections. And persons with more internal connections not only get their business attended to faster but can even sell their contact to other service seekers. In the Ethiopia of yesteryear, Amhara individuals used to be blessed with more contacts inside the governing bodies and hence drew a disproportionate advantage for themselves directly and as go-betweens. It is now claimed that Tigreans are doing the same thing, much more widely. In the end, it is this aspect of the political economy of corruption that makes such governments increasingly alienated from members of other communities. And it is also the very consideration that stands in the way of practicing accountability and transparency.

With these brief general remarks about the transparency and accountability, we have come to the conclusion of using the Moore and Robinson criteria for determining the existence of a democratic order. The purpose of this section was to see the extent to which the originally declared intention of scrapping autocracy and replacing it with democracy has been adhered to. The respect for human rights and the existence of conducive conditions for electoral competition criteria left us with no other option than to conclude that the movement is not away from autocracy and towards democracy. The other two criteria did not produce a much more flattering picture. We can sum up by stating that one form of authoritarian one-party one-ethnic rule is in the process of replacing the one that it overthrew. With this as a background, we can now turn our attention to the second item under the main heading of the political aspect of the transition.

SELF-DETERMINATION

The very process that led to the creation of the present Ethiopian state made the invocation of the principle of self-determination inevitable. The injustice that accompanied this process is now

much more widely acknowledged than was the case barely a couple of decades ago. For "The Ethiopian state was created by Christian highland rulers, largely through a process of political subjugation and economic exploitation of outlying populations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries."⁴⁹ The term "Christian highlanders" is used in reference to the Amhara and Tigrean societies of northern Ethiopia, also known as Abyssinians. The Amharas led the brutal conquest that gave birth to the present Ethiopian state, with the Tigreans serving as their junior partners. The victims of this brutal conquest are such southern peoples as the Oromos, Sidamas, Somalis, Walayitas, etc. The historical reality of the process that resulted in its creation also continued to influence the Ethiopian government's interaction with and perception by these peoples. Ethiopian governments, past and present, are perceived as alien by these peoples. And these peoples' interaction with the Ethiopian state and its officials has always been exploitative and negative, in general. Inevitably, they always looked forward to the day they would throw off the exploitative rule of their conquerors. Some of them started pressing their demand for self-determination in a more organized manner after the 1960s. This was the case especially with the Oromos and the Ogaden Somalis. At the time of the Dergue's overthrow the number of southern peoples who had taken up arms to fight for self-determination had considerably increased, with the Afars, Sidamas, Anuaks, Benishangul, etc. joining the ranks of armed opposition groups.

The circumstance that led to the invocation of the principle of self-determination by the Eritreans and Tigreans falls in a separate category. As already stated, the Tigreans were the junior partners of the Amharas in creating and dominating the present Ethiopian state. A section of Tigrinya speakers had, however, been included in the former Italian colony of Eritrea as a result of an historical quirk that took place at the height of the European scramble for Africa. Consequently, there was a desire both on the side of some of these Tigrinya-speaking Eritreans and the Amhara and Tigrean masters of Ethiopia to rectify this historical mishap through a process of "re-unification." On the other hand, particularly the

other Eritrean communities who happen to be predominantly Moslem and non-Tigrinya speakers resisted this. When “unity” was finally foisted upon them, some elements of these communities raised a rebellion and thus launched the thirty-year struggle for independence. They were soon joined even by an increasing number of Tigrinya-speaking Eritreans who grew disillusioned with the relative backwardness of the politics of Emperor Haile Sellassie’s Ethiopia. With time, the Tigreans also became increasingly dissatisfied with their position within the Amhara-dominated ethnic hierarchy to such an extent that they too joined the struggle for self-determination. Thus, at the time of the Dergue’s overthrow, such diverse peoples as Afars, Benishanguls, Eritreans, Anuaks, Oromos, Ogaden Somalis, Sidamas, Tigreans, etc. were engaged in armed struggle with the objective of achieving self-determination. It is possible that others were just waiting for the right conditions to raise the same question.

The July 1991 Conference had to deal with a specific case of self-determination. The Eritreans had militarily taken control of their country and were seeking primarily the formalization of their independence as amicably as possible. Beyond that, addressing the demand for self-determination tabled by some southern peoples and likely to be tabled by still others could not be overlooked. Hence, the question of self-determination continued to occupy center-stage of Ethiopia’s politics even after Eritrea’s independence became a reality. This resulted in the Transitional Period Charter declaring the start of “a new chapter in Ethiopian history in which freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all the peoples shall be the governing principles of political, economic and social life.”⁵⁰ This espousal of self-determination was further elaborated as follows in Article 2 of the Charter:

The right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nation, nationality and people is guaranteed the right to:

- a. Preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its culture and history and use and develop its language;
- b. Administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom, and fair and proper representation;
- c. Exercise its right to self-determination of independence, when the concerned nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated.⁵¹

Once again, we can compare the commitment made to the principle of self-determination at the beginning of the transition with what was carried over into the period after its conclusion. As with other principles, the commitment to self-determination also continued into the post-transition period, again at least at the rhetorical level. Article 39 of the Federal Constitution is dedicated entirely to the espousal of this principle, as follows:

1. Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.
2. Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.
3. Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in regional and national governments.⁵²

These constitutional provisions continue to generate two diametrically opposite controversies. Members of the overthrown elite do not believe that the principle of self-determination has any relevance to Ethiopian politics. They are, as a result, opposed to any mention of self-determination in the country's constitution. They are even more apprehensive of the elevation of secession to the

level of a constitutional right. They consider doing so as irresponsible and a potential recipe for the balkanization of the entity. They continue to reject even Eritrea's independence, despite the fact that it became inevitable when their government lost the war to keep Eritrea within Ethiopia. Seen in this light, their continued opposition to other peoples' right to self-determination is less surprising.

Most non-Amharas, on the other hand, do not have any quarrel with the recognition of self-determination as a constitutional right. The majority indeed seem to welcome it. They have reservations, however, about the government's willingness to abide by the terms of the constitution in this respect as well. Oromo commentators consider the Constitution's reference to self-determination merely as paying it lip service without meaning to uphold it and to turn it into a ploy for substituting Amhara domination with a Tigrean one. Some foreigners, too, anticipated that this would be the actual outcome of the transitional period. Hasselblatt, for example, takes this line when he observes that the Tigreans want "to take over the ruling role that was played by the Amhara, as if Meles wanted to take his place in the line of imperial figures beside (Yohannes), Menelik, Haile Selassie and Mengistu, whose highest political goal was the subjugation and exploitation of Oromia."⁵³ The experience of the transitional period has a lot to do with fomenting such a sceptical appraisal of the government's declared commitment to self-determination.

We have previously discussed how the very first elections that were conducted during the transitional period, the June 1992 district and regional elections, came to serve as the high-water mark of democratic pluralism in post-Dergue Ethiopia. The other important intention for which those elections were scheduled was to afford the concerned peoples the opportunity to start exercising their right of self-government. This was expected to serve as a major step towards recognition of and respect for their right to self-determination. Had they been conducted relatively fairly, those elections would have served as the starting point for the restoration of the rights that the southern peoples lost at the time of the

conquest that forced them into the Ethiopian state. Many were willing to give the emerging system the benefit of the doubt so long as practical measures are taken to erase the lingering negative consequences of that conquest. Even those who had included an independence clause in their political platforms were willing to see if a modicum of the right to self-government would be restored to their peoples. Hence, there was a willingness to interpret the meaning of the right to self-determination in a rather flexible manner as long as democracy started taking root.

The events surrounding the June 1992 district and regional elections dashed any hopes of democracy in general or the exercise of self-determination taking root. This was confirmed by the reports of one group of foreign observers of those elections after another. Although it chose to use the term "empower" in place of "self-determination," the verdict of the African American Institute (AAI) is straightforward: "The primary political purpose of these elections was, according to the National Charter, to 'empower' through the vote all of Ethiopia's nationalities within a new pluralistic political system. However, this first round of elections fell considerably short of this objective."⁵⁴ The conclusion of the German Observers of the same elections is much more explicit. "We further conclude that for the peoples in western, eastern, central and southern Ethiopia, the elections did not contribute to the implementation of the right of national self-determination, as enshrined in the Transitional National Charter of Ethiopia."⁵⁵ These conclusions emanated from the undeniably undemocratic manner by which the elections of 1992 were conducted. The manner by which the Federal Constitution was drafted and ratified did not indicate TPLF willingness to make an improvement from the initial undemocratic turn that the process took in 1992. Neither did any one of the other elections that were subsequently conducted indicate a preparedness to show an improvement. Instead, the electoral process got less and less competitive and the political space more and more constricted. By the conclusion of the transition, in May 1995, observers were able to conclude that "despite the rhetoric of ethnic autocracy and equality,

the Semitic dominance continues. The change, however, is from Amharic towards Tigrean domination."⁵⁶

Once again, a wide gulf separates TPLF's declared principle to respect the right to self-determination and the Front's obstruction of its actual exercise. The mechanism by which it hopes to continue to juggle verbal recognition of self-determination and practical measures to avert its exercise will be elaborated later on. The precariousness of this contradictory policy has been witnessed in the former USSR and Yugoslavia. In both these two countries, the declared recognition of self-determination was made insincere by the actual political practice that curtailed freedom of expression and organization. The main approach of the ruling parties of these countries had been to arrogate to themselves the exclusive right to organize and speak on behalf of the various nations that they ruled. When their stranglehold on people's legitimate right to speak for themselves slackened the concerned states disintegrated. TPLF's determination to pick the spokespersons and leaders of the southern peoples that it dominates is a repetition of this policy. It is being challenged and it will continue to be. It is hard to believe that the TPLF will continue to succeed where these other more powerful and more sophisticated parties have failed.

NOTES

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22. Ibid. p. 52.
23. Keesing's Contemporary Archives p. 28423.
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Chapter 2

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TRANSITION

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE TRANSITION

The second aspect of the transitional undertaking concerned the economy. This aspect of the transition happened to be just as important and complex as the strictly political one, that we assessed above. For, Ethiopia's economy was in a sorry state when the Dergue regime was overthrown. The combined ill-effects of war and recurrent droughts had wrecked havoc with it during the entire Dergue years. By 1991, Ethiopia ranked as the third poorest country in the world.¹ It was the Dergue regime's policy of overcentralization, perhaps more than war and recurrent droughts, that caused such an abysmal showing by the country's economy.

The degree to which Ethiopia's economy was centralized by the former regime has few parallels in the rest of Africa. The country's fledgling manufacturing sector as well as almost its entire service and transport industries were put under strict central control. Even the country's peasant-based agricultural sector was not spared government meddling. The intention of putting this sector also under direct government control spawned, starting in the mid-1980s, the government's policy of herding peasant farmers into concentration camp like villagization sites. Once herded

into these sites, peasant farmers were compelled to produce only those crops determined by the government and to "sell" their produce to state agencies at prices fixed by the authorities. The result was as immediate as it was devastating. Barely a year after millions of them were relocated and subjected to the government's production-and-pricing regime, peasant farmers were unable to pay taxes. The resulting disappointment, anger, and frustration served as the last straw that broke the back of Ethiopia's agricultural economy.

The harm done by central planning and the collectivization of peasant agriculture did not escape even the attention of the regime's foreign patron at the time. The USSR, which pioneered a similar policy in the 1930s, had a first-hand experience with its devastating outcome. At the time the Dergue was busy aping their previous experience, most Soviet officials appear to be at a stage of seeking a way out of the predicament created by centralized command economy. Hence, it is said that the Soviets had advised the Dergue to soft pedal its agenda of continuously centralizing Ethiopia's economy. The Western powers were, of course, stepping up pressure to influence a revision of the regime's economic policy. These influences added together led to the Dergue regime's hesitant steps, in 1990, to effect a degree of liberalization of the economy. Peasant farmers, in particular, were allowed to sell their produce at market prices and not at the fixed rates that used to be set by government agencies.

This policy change by the Dergue regime was taking place at a time when the TPLF was becoming increasingly confident of capturing state power sooner than later. As a result, the TPLF also was articulating the economic policy that it would institute after taking over power. The economic policy that it unveiled in late February 1991, barely a few months before coming to power, was dubbed "revolutionary democratic economy." This "revolutionary" economic policy allowed for private investment beyond the public sector with no limits imposed on capital invested. Businesses were promised that confiscation without proper compensation would not happen. Although foreign firms were expected to

play a role, priority was to be given to "local capitalists." Just like under the Dergue, land was expected to continue to belong to the government. However, a promise to freely distribute land to whoever wants to work on it was declared. Perhaps the most liberal aspect of TPLF's emerging economic policy was its declaration to let producers sell their produce at the market price. While domestic trade was thus intended to be completely liberalized, foreign trade was expected to remain under total government control.² An investigation of the economic policy that the TPLF was drawing up at the time that it was making the last pushes to capture power will reveal that it had few deviations from the one that the Dergue was starting to adopt. The realities of exercising power forced the TPLF to go one stage further in liberalizing the economy after it came to power.

The steps taken during the first year of the transition indicate a willingness to liberalize the economy to a greater degree than was entertained by the TPLF prior to gaining power. The currency, the Ethiopian Birr, was devalued for the first time in many decades. The transport sector was immediately de-controlled in order to speed up the movement of imports and exports that remained piled up at the ports and inland warehouses. The Dergue's decisions to end government monopoly of agricultural marketing was also upheld. These steps, coupled with good rains, saw the first upswing of the economy in years, registering an 8.4% growth in the 1992/93 fiscal year. It was expected that such reforms would "further boost output via improved producer prices and market access, although the economy's dependence on rain fed agriculture will continue to make for clear swings in growth."³ The economy's impressive improvement during the first year of the transition was down a few percentage points in its second year, predictably because of poor rains. Despite the determining effect of nature, such key institutions as the World Bank and IMF have awarded the TGE high marks for effecting a reversal in the downward slide of the country's economy.

The main objective underpinning the above policy changes, i.e., attracting foreign investors, however, was not immediately

realized. According to a World Bank official, the most that had been achieved by late 1995 was the starting of "small businesses which were being financed by some Ethiopians in the diaspora."⁴ The number of licences issued by the newly established Investment Office of Ethiopia in the first year of its existence, depicts an impressive picture. In practice, however, less than 15% of the more than one thousand private investors that were issued licences⁵ were able to realize their investment ambition by mid-1994. Commenting on the emerging disappointing trend, a US State Department official decried the fact that the businesses that started up were "very few and there [wasn't] much outside Addis Ababa."⁶ A dramatic increase in agricultural production by the country's peasant farmers was expected to be the more meaningful outcome of the currency's devaluation. One US State Department official, who was stationed in the country during the early years of the transition and revisited it in 1995, got the impression that this expectation was being realized.

In contrast to the relatively fast implementation of the above economic policy changes, government steps to privatize state-owned firms were much slower. Extreme centralization of the economy during the Dergue years had resulted in government ownership of almost all manufacturing establishments. As is common in such situations, the inefficiency of these state-owned enterprises became a drain on the country's overall economy. TPLF officials used the metaphor of a leaking barrel to describe the impact of the state-owned enterprises on the economy, a clear indication of their recognition of the dire consequences of keeping these firms under government control. At least one consideration, however, appeared to have caused a hesitation by the officials to take immediate steps to rectify this situation. At a time when tolerating electoral competition seemed to remain on their political agenda, the inevitable worker lay-off that would have followed privatization must have struck them as unpalatable. Thus, privatization had to await the settling of the fate of electoral competition. Privatizing state-owned firms became much less threatening only after electoral competition was rendered inoperable. Such a situation had been created

by 1995, resulting in the first steps being taken to dispose of firms worth 20 million Birr or more. By the middle of 1995, 144 such enterprises were up for sale.⁷ It was only after this period that observers were able to conclude that "Ethiopia's privatization process is finally under way."⁸ Later reports indicate that once privatization got off the ground in mid-1995 it continued at a steady pace.

In contrast to their failure to honestly implement the political changes they declared upon coming to power, TPLF officials deserve a passing grade in bringing about economic policy changes. They seem convinced that they can single-handedly deliver prosperity to the peoples of Ethiopia by building on these initial steps. Only time will tell the degree to which they will succeed in carrying off this ambition. However, the likelihood of the continued success of their economic liberalization in the absence of a similar political policy does not strike one as very promising. The existence of an intimate relationship between the empowerment of local communities and the achievement of sustainable economic development is now being increasingly recognized. According to one writer, "Poverty is most diminished and violence most constrained when democracy smooths the edges of societies in transition."⁹ One self-styled benevolent dictator after another has declared the intention of putting bread before democracy during the last three decades in Africa. The incontestable end result has been not only plummeting economic growth but also escalating strife fomented by the rising impoverishment of the populace. Based on the experience of the last three decades, it is possible to conclude that TPLF's attempt to produce a meaningful economic development while denying fundamental freedoms to the peoples of Ethiopia is not very promising. Under the prevailing circumstance, the policy presently pursued by the TPLF may inject into Ethiopia's political life additional strategic causes for conflict. The impression that members of the Tigrean nation are being afforded undue advantages to come into the ownership of former government firms is already quite widespread. At the same time, most non-Tigreans are convinced that a disproportionate amount of economic devel-

opment funding is flowing into Tigray region. The fact that TPLF-owned firms are taking control of the commanding heights of the country's economy is less disputable than allegations about disproportionate development capital flowing into Tigray region. The belief that those who control state power enrich themselves and members of their ethnic group should be the cause of great concern. The resulting jealousy and inter-communal suspicion can only threaten to foment inter-communal strife to a scale unseen in Ethiopian history. Instituting a much more fair and transparent political system is the only recourse that can curb the continued degeneration of the country's politics to this worrying level.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECT OF THE TRANSITION

The administrative aspect of the transition involved replacing the provisional government established by the TPLF immediately after coming to power on May 28, 1991 with a new administration conforming with the decisions of the July 1991 Conference. This single-party TPLF provisional administration that hosted the Conference was supposed to be phased out and to be replaced by a more participatory one reflecting the spirit that prevailed at the Conference. In hindsight, it is now possible to conclude that this very first step to start the implementation of the Charter met with utter failure. This means that the transition was aborted before it even got off the ground.

The initial steps to realize a more participatory administration did actually get off on a promising footing. The interim-legislature, the Council of Representatives, functioned as a genuine multi-party legislature during the first few months of the transitional period. Its early deliberations were marked with a lively and open political debate in which striking deals to arrive at compromise solutions started to be practiced. The situation that prevailed in the executive wing, the Council of Ministers, however, did not get off on such a promising note. There were clear indications that the TPLF was determined to turn this organ into a mere rubber stamp to approve decisions already reached by its inner cabinet.

To achieve this end, the TPLF-appointed prime minister, supported by his other colleagues in the Council of Ministers, tended to fudge procedures for conducting honest and open discussions. This tendency frustrated some independent appointees of the TGE, resulting in the resignation of a couple of them. The appointees of participating parties, particularly the OLF, did try to make the Council of Ministers a functioning forum for real debate. Their complaints about procedural issues were, however, either dismissed outright or glossed over by TPLF's Prime Minister.

The picture emerging in the various ministries was no less disappointing. Low-ranking TPLF officials, who were appointed during the provisional period, often acted as if they were not answerable to the higher authorities of the various ministries. The picture that emerged in the Ministry of Information served as the most glaring example of this sort of insubordination. Although the minister during the early months of the transitional period happened to be a senior OLF official, vitriolic anti-OLF propaganda was conducted by the government-operated public information media. Even his instructions that OLF responses to TPLF accusations also be aired were easily and routinely obstructed. More than any thing else, this situation exposed the fake nature of the co-operation assumed to be existing between the parties that supposedly jointly established the government and hoped to run it in a co-operative manner.

Extending the more co-operative spirit that prevailed in the Council of Representatives also to the Council of Ministers and other organs of the government was discussed between top OLF and TPLF officials on a number of occasions. Worried about the fast-deteriorating relations between these two key participants in the TGE, officials of the Provisional Government of Eritrea took the necessary steps to convene a meeting between them at which this issue was addressed. The then Secretary of the Provisional Government of Eritrea, and later President, suggested the formation of a joint high council to improve cooperation between the OLF and TPLF in the Council of Ministers. Although the sug-

gestion was approved by the top officials of the OLF and TPLF, the disillusionment of OLF-appointed ministers had reached such a stage that they considered the idea as inadequate to curb the gradual slide toward a single-party TPLF government.

In the meantime, the ferocity of particularly OLF and TPLF confrontation in the rural areas was steadily increasing. Violence between the forces of the two groups in fact started while the July 1991 Conference was still in session and continued almost uninterrupted up to the total breakdown of relations in June 1992. Beginning with the first incident that took place during the Conference, the OLF proposed one approach after another in order to contain and end the recurrence of violence between the forces of the two organizations. Each measure that was taken to do so, however, almost invariably produced the direct opposite result of increasing suspicion and animosity. The history of this effort, more than any thing else, testifies to OLF willingness to give the benefit of the doubt to TPLF pronouncements about implementing democratic change.

The first OLF suggestion to deal with the violence that erupted during the July 1991 Conference was to facilitate liaisoning between the officials of the two organizations stationed in the concerned administrative regions. The OLF recommended that a liaison committee embracing the top officials of the two parties be created in each region. The terms of reference for such committees that it drafted were presented to a meeting of top OLF, TPLF, and EPLF officials a couple of days after the July 1991 Conference was concluded and was approved. The main idea was providing a forum at which the representatives of the two forces would sort out differences through dialogue instead of resorting to violent means.

A traditional Oromo conflict-resolution mechanism often reinforced the liaison committees' role to contain violence. Mediation by local notables or elders to end or avert conflict is deep rooted in Oromo society. In some cases, Oromo elders spontaneously fell back on this tradition and took the initiative to look into the causes of the conflict that erupted between OLF and TPLF

forces. In others, the representatives of the two organizations, either unilaterally or bilaterally, appealed to local elders to intervene to bring an on-going conflict to an end. Unfortunately, the very steps that were taken to entrench and institutionalize the liaison committees and committees of elders resulted in widening the scope of the conflicts instead of ending them.

The liaisioning arrangement initially appeared to be effective at the regional and zonal levels. Inter-party consultations did avert the possible escalation of a few incidents of conflict or misunderstanding. This impression spawned the plan to extend the formation of liaison committees down to the district and lower localities. In fact, it was this effort that, unfortunately, not only spelled the liaison committee's death sentence but also generated a more extensive mood of suspicion and violence. TPLF delegates to the liaison committees at the higher levels were mostly the more self-confident Tigrean commanders of its troops. At the district and lower levels, however, TPLF representatives to the liaison committees were drawn from the Oromo branch of the TPLF known as the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO). Most of these individuals were former Dergue soldiers who were captured by the TPLF and were subsequently given a rudimentary political education in order to turn them into its messengers to the Oromos living in their home areas. The abduction and conscription of these individuals into the Dergue army took place often under unfortunate circumstances. They were often picked either because they lacked the social or material influence to avert conscription or because they were local misfits that communities eagerly handed over to the Dergue military. Hence, not surprisingly, the relation of most of them with the localities to which they were returned as TPLF spokespersons was at least tense if not outright hostile. In addition, they were, as often as not, either completely illiterate or barely literate. In contrast, most of those assigned by the OLF to join these in the formation of district liaison committees, had much more education and hence evinced much more self-confidence. The tense relation that existed between the former TPLF POWs and the concerned local communities also rarely

applied to OLF representatives. In addition, OLF delegates to the district liaison committees were, by and large, civilian school-leavers hastily trained and assigned by the OLF as its representatives. These very contrasting personalities were to join each other in the liaison committee to promote a certain degree of understanding and toleration. OPDO members of the TPLF displayed much more interest in finding out why such a committee was at all being formed. In one particular incident, an OPDO operative who was dispatched to Waliso, Western Shoa region, to launch the local liaison committee was asked by his subordinates why the committee is being formed at all. He responded that the formation of the liaison committee was to pave the way for local elections to be held in the very near future. Asked what would happen to the members of the losing party after the election, he responded that they would be returned to their original occupations. The OLF representative who was with him at the time later recalled the shock with which his response was received by local OPDO persons. The "occupation" to which they were being invited to return in case of losing the upcoming election was evidently not a very attractive one. From that time until the total break down of relations between the two organizations, these TPLF delegates to the district liaison committees were more interested in forcefully expelling their OLF competitors than in containing conflict. As former soldiers, they were much more prone to use force in settling all differences than were the civilian delegates of the OLF. Hence, extending the liaison committee structure to the localities ended up fanning more violence than existed prior to their formation. The number of OLF local delegates shot dead by TPLF's messengers to the Oromo people runs into the hundreds.

Intervention by Oromo elders to settle conflicts between the OLF and TPLF also did not have a better fate. The thinking that came to influence the political philosophy of both OLF and TPLF has its roots in the leftist political mood of the 1960s and early 1970s. Despite this similarity in their political orientation, OLF attitude towards the traditional institution of the elders as a conflict-mitigating mechanism stood in stark contrast to that of the

TPLF. OLF personnel, from the highest officials to local operatives, displayed an unmistakable willingness to abide by the decisions of mediating elders even in cases when such decisions did not completely coincide with the Front's political agenda. For example, I once signed a pact with TPLF's OPDO under pressure from a committee of mediating elders while remaining fully conscious of the unpopularity of doing so among the rank-and-file OLF members. At a time when we were still peacefully courting the political support of the Oromo people, I was convinced that offending the elders would have negative consequences.

A similar belief cannot be discerned in the political practice of TPLF officials and local operatives. I can enumerate a number of incidents in which TPLF personnel chose to uphold only those decisions of the elders that happened to coincide with their own views and fit into their plan. One can trace the contrasting reception of the verdicts of the elders by the OLF and TPLF to the cultural differences separating the communities from which the two organizations emerged. The Tigrean political ethos is a much more hierarchical one, in which the political leadership is expected to have the final say, than is the case in Oromo society. The OLF, considering itself as the vehicle for the restoration of Oromo political culture, was duty-bound to abide by the verdicts of the elders. The TPLF, however, only selectively respected the decisions of elders. As more and more of the elders' decisions failed to coincide with the implementation of its political agenda, the number of decisions by elders that it rejected continued to increase. Eventually, it branded the elders as partisan and nothing other than "members" of the OLF. Hence, the institution of the elders too, hence, was drawn into the conflict instead of remaining an effective neutral broker of peace.

When intervention by the elders and the formation of liaison committees proved unable to check the rising number of incidents of conflict, a different approach was attempted to curb the gradual slide towards total breakdown of relations. Conducting a joint seminar that brought together the top provincial representatives of the OLF and TPLF was just such a final effort to save the relation-

ship. At this seminar, the idea of maintaining a certain element of co-operation while engaging each other in a fair and peaceful political competition was extensively discussed. How such a practice can be promoted was explored with representatives of both fronts contributing their views. One clear message was the need to learn how to respond to verbal attacks in kind instead of resorting to violent means. Unfortunately, by the time the seminar was conducted, relations between the top commanders of the two organizations had soured to such an extent that reviving any degree of mutual confidence proved unachievable. Violence continued unabated after the seminar was concluded. Any subsequent contact between the forces of the two fronts inevitably degenerated into armed violence with uncontrollable speed and rising frequency. Over time, a situation was created in which the OLF could not do political work in areas administered by the TPLF and vice versa. Since the TPLF-administered areas of Oromia were by far larger than those of the OLF, the former was not as dissatisfied with the emerging situation as the latter was. As the time of the district and regional elections drew near, the number of violent incidents continued to rise. The threat posed to the elections by this situation necessitated taking new and drastic measures to create conditions more conducive to running elections.

Removing the former guerrilla commanders of both fronts from public administration duties and replacing them with a relatively more neutral group of administrators was resorted to as the last desperate measure. This was to be accompanied by the garrisoning of the troops of both fronts in order to remove the use of armed means from the political contest that was expected to precede the elections. Only a small percentage of TPLF troops was to be allowed a limited amount of movement to protect certain key installations and rail and road transport networks. Garrisoning the troops and creating a more neutral local administration were expected to remove the use of armed means and personnel to influence the events leading up to the running of the district and local elections. The OLF suggestion was to jointly create a roster of a certain number of potential candidates out of which district

administrators acceptable to both parties were to be picked. The TPLF's insistence that a rough election be conducted to have these district administrators "elected" resulted in scheduling the election that came to be more commonly referred to as the "snap election". The election of a police force by the local communities that would take over the duty up to then performed by the troops of the fronts was also to be carried out during this time. This relative distancing of the troops of the fronts from the political process was expected to create more conducive conditions for running the "real" district and local elections.

Although the election was to be conducted in order to replace the undeniably partisan administrators, contesting parties were out to achieve at least one end. At the minimum, they were eager to avert the election of those they perceived as the supporters of their opposition. And they obviously were not averse to having their supporters elected. Hence, instead of producing quasi-neutral administrators, the "snap election" came to serve as a measure of the relative popularity of the contesting parties. To the TPLF, in particular, early results of the "snap election" showed that it "lacked genuine support in certain regions."¹⁰ This must have come as a surprise to TPLF leaders, who went into the elections expecting easy victory for a number of reasons. They expected popular sentiment to be overwhelmingly in their favor as a recognition of the major part played by their front in ending the detested Dergue rule. TPLF's clear advantage in human and material resources over that of the competing parties also was expected to render the achievement of the front's aims comparatively easy. Early results of the "snap election" showed that these expectations were unrealistic, at least in some regions. This realization triggered a feverish activity by the TPLF to use every means at its disposal to change reality to fit into its dream of reaping uncontested popularity. The electoral law was violated in the process and its military was unleashed against any significant competitor.

Running the "snap election" over and over until the result desired by the TPLF is achieved was one of the tactics resorted to in some localities. In Naqamte, Eastern Walaga, for example, the

“snap election” was conducted three times. On the third occasion, TPLF armed personnel surrounded the polling station producing the intended result of reducing attendance by unwanted persons.¹¹ The step that was designed to end the use of arms and armed personnel in political work in fact resulted in the direct opposite practice, in contravention of the electoral law. Juggling representation in the body that was to oversee the election was the other tactic resorted to by the TPLF to achieve the desired result. The election commission was supposed to be made up of representatives of competing parties in order to guard against abuse. In some cases, the TPLF took a surprising measure to tilt the deliberations of the commission in its favor. Members of various subgroups of its so-called coalition, the EPRDF, were designated to represent their “organization” on the commission. Hence, persons designated as the representatives of the TPLF, EPDM, and OPDO sometimes joined another one supposedly representing the overall coalition, the EPRDF, to sit on the commission.¹² In this way, the votes of at least four members of the commission were made to be identical, for these representatives in reality were all taking their directives from the TPLF.

Even the combined effect of using armed persons and manipulating membership in the election commission was found inadequate to guarantee the achievement of TPLF’s aims. And hence the TPLF found it necessary to take a most irregular and illegal step to avert the election’s fairness. This was banning the structures of the National Election Commission (NEC) below the Regional level in the midst of the electoral process. This was made possible when, under pressure from the TPLF, the NEC started to simply promulgate administrative regulations.¹³ The task that was supposed to be performed by the organs of the NEC was then simply transferred to the local “administrators,” whose allegiance to the TPLF was unquestionable. Hence, as part of the preparation for the June district and local elections, “ballots were simply addressed to the provisional government or delivered to the local EPRDF office.”¹⁴ TPLF’s local representatives had no qualms about admitting that they were entrusted with carrying

out all electoral processes, as was done by one of them in Awasa, Southern Region, who said that "the TGE relies on the (local EPRDF affiliate) to carry out the local election process."¹⁵

Members of the other parties were understandably very opposed to this practice and pressed for delaying the delivery of election materials pending the reconstitution of the organs of the NEC in conformity with the law. The TPLF, however, insisted that its local administrators should continue to carry out the electoral process while the re-constituting of the organs of the election commission was under way. Its main argument was that the "June 21 election date" be preserved. Achieving this target date took precedence over conducting the elections according to the law. As a result of TPLF pressures, the NEC displayed an uncanny "willingness ... to compromise with prescribed procedures."¹⁶ Participating parties, finding competition under such a situation futile, started withdrawing from the race one after the other. It was at this critical stage that demands to allow enough time for the rectification of the electoral process came from another quarter. "A few days before the election day, several members of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa proposed a two-week delay in conducting the elections in exchange for a commitment by the OLF and other withdrawing parties to participate. The TGE, citing imminent onset of the rainy season, rejected the proposal."¹⁷ As the leader of the OLF delegation to the meeting with members of the diplomatic community and top TPLF officials, I once more insisted that precedence be given to the restoration of the neutral organs of the NEC. The same view was espoused by 20 other participating parties who signed a memorandum asking that legally prescribed election procedures be upheld.¹⁸ TPLF rejection of this demand by the majority of TGE participants came as a clear revelation of its preparedness to start whittling away at the pluralist nature of the politics of the transitional period. This trend continued to develop in a direction that eventually made the so-called TGE almost indistinguishable from the TPLF.

Hence, such key electoral processes as registration of voters and distribution of election materials were conducted prior to the

re-creation of the bodies that were to perform these functions in a less partisan manner. In some localities, this illegal electoral procedure alone was evidently found inadequate to assure TPLF victory. This was particularly the case in regions where the TPLF was facing considerable competition. Observers were able to see a correlation between the existence of a meaningful competition and the ferocity of TPLF's acts of intimidation and harassment of candidates and voters. One such report states: "observers tended to find evidence of institutional rigging and manipulation of the electoral rules by the EPRDF. This pattern existed in almost all of Region 4 (Oromia) and 13 (Harer). There was a direct correlation between the degree of electoral competition and the level of imprisonment, harassment, misuse of authority and materials, name-calling and cheating. Military forces were more visible in these areas as well. In a few places (far western Oromia, rural areas in far eastern Oromia and the Oromia/Ogaden boundary areas) the OLF acted in a similar manner, but rarely with the same degree of intensity."¹⁹

The "snap election" and the June 21, 1992 district and regional elections came to serve as the high watermark of the pluralism of the transitional period. Disillusionment over the crude and arrogant violation of the electoral law by the TPLF during these elections resulted in the withdrawal of those forces that had staked their future on the fairness of these elections. Departure or expulsion of participating parties from the TGE started during these elections and continued to grow in the following months. The verdict of foreign observers is unambiguous. "In the end, the elections marked the transition from an uncertain government of national unity to a one-party system, thinly disguised by the existence of minor opposition groups and by the fact that the EPRDF was itself a coalition of ethnic movements albeit controlled by the TPLF."²⁰ The original expectation—that the pluralism of the TGE would continue to expand to embrace more and more societal sectors—was dashed. The following comment by a foreign observer is a fitting epitaph for Ethiopia's transition to democracy: "The formal process of democratization in Ethiopia, as it

was conceived in 1991 and carried out in the following years, was thus a failure. The Ethiopian government was more narrowly based and had less legitimacy in 1994 than in 1991."²¹

The TGE was originally conceived as a joint venture by the parties that signed the Charter. The spirit of co-operation that it reflected was expected to steadily expand to embrace a growing number of governmental institutions and societal sectors. The very first step that was taken to put this idea into practice was conducting a rough election to diversify the nature of public administration at local levels. Had this step succeeded, the subsequent elections—the June 1992 district and local elections—would have been conducted under a more promising atmosphere. Instead, this initial plan was hijacked by the TPLF to serve as a stepping-stone for its intention of emerging as the sole winner of any future elections. The process that was designed to progressively replace the Provisional Government of the TPLF by the organs of the TGE was thus made to serve the opposite purpose of increasingly making the exercise of power a TPLF monopoly. Hence, it is plausible to conclude that the transition was aborted before it even got off the ground.

CHANGES OF ATTITUDE

Mutual distrust and suspicion is deep-seated in the daily life of particularly northern Ethiopians. An Amharic saying that runs "he who does not suspect is liable to be the one to be weeded out" is a testimony to the entrenched nature of suspicion in social interaction. Such suspicion, of course, takes on a more exaggerated form in politics, an activity naturally marked by feelings of mutual distrust. And in the experience of Ethiopia, politics is perceived as the pursuit of mutually exclusive ambitions and control. The belief that contestants can hold some values in common while differing in others was rarely found to exist. The more common feeling was that "those who are not totally for us are totally against us," with nothing else in between. This often translated itself into the established Ethiopian political practice of absorbing, co-opt-

ing, or subordinating others and physically eliminating all those who refuse to accept one of these options. Under such an atmosphere, one is forced to exercise maximum vigilance, lest he/she be "the one that is weeded out." The urge to pre-empt one's elimination, of course, fosters the tendency to be the first one to strike. The other outcome of this tradition is the absence of a horizontal interaction between Ethiopian political groups. Inter-party relations had to always be vertical, through absorption or subordination, a pre-condition felt necessary for the creation of a similar relation with the rest of society.

The Charter and the Government that was based on it were expected to usher in a departure from this tradition. The principles enshrined in the Charter were taken as the values upheld in common by the participants. Implementing the transitional program and running the TGE were also considered as their joint venture. Suspicion that such a set-up may just be a smokescreen for Tigrean ascendancy into the role of a new dominant ethnic group, however, continued to lurk in the minds of many participants. Hence, they were ever on guard to forestall the achievement of such an end. Their frequent and early accusation of the TPLF's un-democratic practices and violations of the principles enshrined in the Charter emanated from this mind-set.

TPLF officials, on the other hand, often displayed a feeling of disappointment when such accusations were levelled against their front. Their most vociferous critics often happened to be those who had no role in the armed struggle that ended the detested Dergue rule. Seen from a TPLF perspective, it is likely that criticism by such groups was interpreted as lack of appreciation for the sacrifices borne by Tigrean society to bring down the Dergue. TPLF leaders were surprised to see that they were reaping criticism instead of the adulation that they considered their due. Seen from the perspective of these critics, on the other hand, vigilantly maintaining the democratization process on track was the only way to avert the conversion of "liberation" by the TPLF into domination by it. Since TPLF commitment to the process was considered pivotal for the success of the democratization pact, constantly

monitoring this Front's actions and behaviors became an obvious necessity.

The nature of relations between the OLF and TPLF falls in a category of its own. From among the participants in the transitional arrangement, these two had had a longer period of contact and interaction. And relations between them had seen good times as well as bad ones. An undercurrent of fear and suspicion was, however, never missing, even at the best of times. By the late 1980s relations had turned for the worse, as the OLF started reading clear signals of TPLF intentions to eventually eliminate it. The first such signal was oddly packaged in a TPLF invitation to the OLF to participate in the formation of a United Front against the Dergue. The TPLF was at the same time planning the creation of another kind of united front, called the United Democratic Front. In Marxist guerrilla parlance, the former kind of united front is called for in order to harness the co-operation of potential future enemies in the task of jointly weakening the present one. The latter type of united front, however, is created with the purpose of laying the basis of the eventual ruling Marxist-Leninist party. TPLF's candid statements that the OLF can qualify only for the former type of united front was an indication of what it eventually intended to do to it. From this time on, relations between the OLF and TPLF continued to worsen, reaching their all time low when the formation of the "Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization" from former POWs was announced. This event led the OLF to conclude that the TPLF is putting the final touches on its plan to appear as the new northern conqueror of Oromia and the entire south.

Despite these early indications of TPLF's plan to eventually eliminate it, OLF leaders were willing to give TPLF espousal of pluralist democracy the benefit of the doubt. Assurances and pressures by neighboring governments and Western powers played a considerable role in OLF's willingness to take the risk of engaging the TPLF in the exercise of fashioning a democratic order. OLF leaders, in their speech at the conclusion of the July 1991 Conference, spoke of being "sceptically optimistic" that the his-

tory of domination in Ethiopia will finally be put to rest. In the following few months, they realized that their message was touching an important cord in the hearts of the Oromo people. In contrast, the Oromo branch of the TPLF faced at least the distrust of the people. Once the OLF realized that it had an edge over its main rivals, it was much more interested in defending and expanding democratic public contest. By the same logic, the OLF became increasingly apprehensive that the situation may encourage the TPLF also to resort to the kind of struggle in which it had more advantage, i.e., armed means.

OLF fear that the TPLF would lean increasingly on its military to achieve its political aim appeared even more inevitable as the dilemma faced by the TPLF's Oromo wing continued to grow. In order to effectively compete with the OLF and other autonomous groups, TPLF's subsidiary had to take some concrete political steps to champion the Oromo cause. One approach that it came up with was attacking the symbols of Amhara conquest and subordination of the Oromo people. Staging a demonstration against the statue of Emperor Menelik, the architect of Amhara rule, was one facet of this approach. Unleashing the most vitriolic condemnation of neftegnas, the descendants of Menelik's soldiers who are not well liked by the Oromo people, was another TPLF tactic to divert attention from its aspiration of emerging as the new master. Few Oromos, if any, fell for this trick. What the TPLF achieved in the process was reaping Amhara anger. Even Menelik's statue became a beneficiary of the exercise, with Amharas raising enough money to give it a bronze coating. Oromo apprehension that Tigreans are bent on replacing the Amharas as the new masters was not ameliorated.

The Oromo wing of the TPLF had to do much more than condemn Menelik and the neftegnas to win Oromo endorsement. One alternative way for its members to gain acceptability as legitimate spokespersons for the Oromo cause was to display a minimum of autonomy from their Tigrean commanders. This, of course, ran afoul of the overall TPLF strategy to use these individuals as the reign to check a meaningful Oromo self-expression. Incidents

in which some of these individuals attempted to challenge or disagree with the views of their Tigrean bosses in order to save face with the local community cropped up from time to time. Had any such measure succeeded, they could have easily become a significant political force. Their self-confidence to engage others in political competition would have also increased apace. This path would have led not only to the likelihood of their success over their Oromo counterparts but also in carving for themselves a fitting position within the TPLF coalition, the EPRDF, as genuine partners. Continuing to toe the TPLF line, on the other hand, had two inescapable consequences. Firstly, using TPLF military muscle to compensate for their disadvantage in engaging in political competition, became inevitable. Secondly and by the same token, they had to relinquish the right to assert themselves within the TPLF coalition as genuine partners and had to continue as subalterns. This happened to be the only option that could fit into TPLF's political culture as we will discuss in a later section. The TPLF's strategy has an in-built contradiction. Its main intention is harnessing Oromo nationalism for averting the come-back of Amhara hegemony. At the same time, Oromo opposition to the replacement of Amhara domination by its Tigrean variety had to be frustrated. And the growing realization that such a replacement could not be achieved merely politically made TPLF resort to military means, the only feasible alternative.

The OLF, on the other hand, was willing to go to the extreme to give political competition a chance. It was competing on its home ground against a force perceived as alien and its local surrogates. Its relative acceptability by the Oromo society as a champion of its cause was and remains unquestionable. The inability by TPLF's Oromo wing to start asserting itself as a genuine independent voice made this OLF relative popularity a permanent feature of the politics of the transition and thereafter. The same can indeed be said to prevail in the home areas of other peoples as well. The OLF could not unilaterally disavow the use of military means in the face of growing TPLF resort to arms. The relatively hesitant use of armed means by the OLF by comparison with the

TPLF has been attested to by foreign observers of the June 1992 elections, as was documented above. Attempts to foster a spirit of mutual confidence failed because reconciling the contrasting objectives of the two forces and the equally divergent means to achieve them proved insurmountable. The end result, naturally, became a growing rift between the two main participants in the implementation of the transitional undertaking. TPLF relations with the other participants also more or less followed the same trend of growing disaffection and distrust.

Relations between the participating parties on the one hand and members of the society on the other was also expected to grow increasingly amicable for the transition to democracy to succeed. During the early days of the transitional period, it was possible to gauge the degree to which participating parties were winning the confidence of the people. This was possible only so long as the people felt confident enough to openly show their support for or against any one particular group. In large parts of the country, such a situation seemed to exist up to the time of the June 1992 elections. This often manifested itself in the prevalence of a discernible "election fever" during these elections. Observers witnessed the existence of "evident enthusiasm exhibited at many polling sites"²² during the first series of elections. Societal mood during the last election of the transitional period, the May 1995 election, stood in stark contrast to the euphoria that prevailed at the time of the June 1992 elections. The Norwegian Observers of this last election described the existence of an overwhelming feeling of despondency, resignation, and going through the motions of "voting" basically because it seemed to be what the authorities wanted. Expressing in public one's preferences of political groups or opinions disappeared along with the realization that force was being employed as the sole legitimating factor of power. State-people relations, as a result, by and large has not undergone a significant change from what it was under previous regimes. Most members of non-Tigrean societies have hence gone back to the habit of approaching state institutions and functionaries with reserve, distrust, and fear. Instead of promoting an inter-party un-

derstanding and confidence as a prelude to creating a similar relation with the public, the events of the transitional period achieved the direct opposite on both counts. A growing inter-party conflict and animosity produced a similar form of interaction with the peoples. And now it is threatening to even infuse inter-communal relations with the same kind of animosity because of the perception that Tigrean society is the major beneficiary of the TPLF rule.

THE ROLE OF ARMS IN POLITICS

According to the deep-seated northern Ethiopian political tradition, armed revolt is assumed to be the only means by which political change can be brought about. Such a belief remained the central aspect of Ethiopian politics up to the days of Emperor Haile Selassie. It became even more so during the era of the Dergue. Hence, the armed struggle against the Dergue in some ways was a continuation of this deep-seated Abyssinian political tradition. In addition, the fronts that were fighting against the Dergue had incorporated into their political and military strategies lessons drawn from successful guerrilla rebellions world-wide. As a result, most of these fronts were from the very outset conceived as politico-military organizations in the fullest sense of the term, a matter that will be elaborated in Part II of this work.

Handling political and military affairs as a single entity thus came to be the foundation of the strategic thinking of the fronts that were engaged in the anti-Dergue struggle. According to this thinking, political victory can be achieved and guaranteed only by military means. And similarly, military victory is taken as the incontestable proof of the correctness of one's political line. Hence, military victory and success in political work were equated in the thinking of these fronts. Resorting to arms was in fact the only realistic means to oppose the repressive rule of the Dergue regime. The regime's ever escalating unpopularity did also accrue to the relative popularity of its armed antagonists. As a result, the

correspondence between their growing military strengths and their increasing political popularity had some plausible basis.

The adoption of the UDHR as the TGE's guiding principle was hoped to end the deeply entrenched tradition of political repression. And a growing respect of human rights and democratic liberties was also expected to phase out resort to arms as the only means of pursuing political objectives. Most of the participants in the politics of the transitional period were unarmed civilian parties that came forward based on the hope that such democratic liberties would be respected. The situation confronting former guerrilla groups was, however, quite different. For them, the political and military aspects of the struggle against the Dergue regime were closely intertwined. Such groups were expected to shed their militaristic nature as the willingness by all participants to respect democratic liberties became increasingly credible. On the contrary, if a relapse to repression looked inevitable, their reversion to armed rebellion was assumed to naturally follow. This was perhaps the core of the problem confronting Ethiopia's attempt to bring about a transition to democracy.

The other peculiar problem confronting Ethiopia's attempt to bring about a transition to democracy was the complete absence of neutral state and civic bodies to effectively adjudicate between contending groups. The courts and other state institutions, and even civic bodies, were so politicized under the Dergue that they had lost all credibility in the eyes of the public. For the Dergue and its party, the WPE, "exercised tight control over the political processes, judicial functions, the media, labour and education." As a result, the groups that overthrew the Dergue expected nothing but a feeling of hostility from the former regime's institutions and agencies. Submitting their cases to any one of these bodies was of course out of the question. Already in the first few weeks of the transition, some of the former regime's apparently innocuous establishments were engaged in sabotaging the TGE. For example, the government-owned printing press deliberately botched the printing of the Charter. Similar other incidents clearly demonstrated to those who were coming to power the danger of trusting any of the

agencies and personnel inherited from the Dergue. The resulting pervasive and mutual distrust and animosity made dismantling these agencies and replacing them with new ones inescapable.

Unfortunately, the new bodies that replaced the former regime's institutions and agencies turned out to be no less partisan. TPLF troops that were adopted as a temporary defence force, in particular, were created by and for the TPLF to promote its political ambition. In addition, TPLF determination to create new labor and professional unions loyal to itself to replace those that existed under the Dergue became manifest in the early days of the transition. A similar attempt to infuse the bureaucracy with its own cronies was observed from the very outset. The status and behavior of TPLF troops became by far the most threatening aspect of TPLF's determination to replace the former regime's partisan bodies with its own variety. It was to address this particular problem that the OLF came up with idea of garrisoning troops and of creating quasi-neutral administration in the run up to the district and regional elections. As has already been explained, this initiative was effectively foiled by the TPLF, with the tacit understanding of the US Government that brokered the agreement to implement it.

In retrospect, it is possible to speculate that the TPLF decision to clip the military wing of the OLF predates the conclusion of the garrisoning agreement. Hence, it is possible that the TPLF used the opportunity afforded by the garrisoning agreement to turn a proposal to bring about a mutual demilitarization of the political process into a unilateral one. Disarming other groups while arrogating to itself the exclusive right to employ armed means to impose its will has subsequently expanded to affect other groups as well. From the very beginning of the transitional period, TPLF emphasis on the role of its army differed from the pre-occupation of the other participants. To most TPLF operatives, the proclamation that made TPLF troops the country's interim defence force was more supreme than the Charter. In contrast, other parties put much more emphasis on the rights guaranteed by the Charter. Such a clash of priorities continued to worsen with the TPLF

increasingly relying on its military muscle to curtail the survival of credible opposition groups. The original intention of encouraging all participants to shed their militaristic nature was thus stood on its head with the TPLF emerging as the only officially armed group.

The statement about the Dergue government exercising “tight control over the political processes, judicial functions, the media, labour and education” has subsequently grown increasingly applicable also to the TPLF-dominated government. Again, the most menacing aspect of the TPLF’s determination to politicize state institutions has to do with the defence and security establishments. We will have the opportunity, at a later stage, to elucidate in much more detail the identity between military and political functions in former guerrilla organizations like the TPLF. In these kinds of structures, the role of military personnel and apparently civilian officials are almost completely indistinguishable. Civilian officials of these kinds of fronts are presumed to be just as well versed in military matters as the military personnel are about political affairs. Knowledge about the fusion of military and political roles in these kinds of fronts makes reports of resignations of “former” TPLF commanders from the front a disingenuous affair. Those who are aware of this reality cannot consider the officials of the present Ethiopian defence and security establishments as anything other than the armed wing of the TPLF.

CONCLUSION

We have gone to considerable lengths to document in detail the achievements and failures of the plan to bring about democratization in Ethiopia. The facts assembled above point to one inescapable conclusion: on balance, areas of success are outstripped by those of failure. Respect for human rights is by far the most indisputable and pivotal area of failure. One respected international human rights watchdog agency after another has exposed the continuation of human rights violations under the TGE and the present Federal Government. Of course, no one realistically expected vio-

lations of human rights to be switched off as suddenly as their respect is switched on. But witnessing a growing respect of human rights was considered essential to give the process the benefit of the doubt. It is the absence of such a growing improvement of the TPLF-dominated government's human rights record that, more than other considerations, underlines the failure of the transition to democracy. Reported cases of human rights violations during the period immediately before and after the conclusion of the transition attest to the absence of such an improvement. Hence, the purported hand-over of power from the TGE to the Federal Government was not accompanied by an improvement in the area of respect for human rights. An historical opportunity to forge a new and inclusive Ethiopian state is the main casualty of the derailment of the democratization undertaking.

NOTES

1. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile : Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti* (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1994 - 95), p. 12.
2. *The Horn of Africa Bulletin* 2 (Uppsala, Sweden : Life and Peace Institute, 91) : 10.
3. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile : Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti* (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1994 -95), p. 15.
4. *The Eye on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa*, Vol. IV No. 19 p. 17.
5. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile* 1994 - 95 p. 24.
6. Rose Umoren, "Ethiopia : No Longer A Stalinist Backwater," *The Eye on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa*, 4, 19 (Aug. - Sept. 1995) : 17.
7. Ibid. p. 4.
8. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report : Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti* (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 3rd Quarter 1995), p. 7.

9. Jonathan Powers, "Why the Rich Must Show the Way Out of the Mire," *The Daily Nation* of Kenya 2 Jan. 1996.
10. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1992), p. 26.
11. Ibid. p. 44.
12. Ibid. p. 45.
13. Ibid. p. 20.
14. Ibid. p. 32.
15. Ibid. p. 27.
16. Ibid. p. 22.
17. Ibid. p. 31.
18. Incidentally, the allegation that some of the signatories were forgeries is not true. At the time, two blocs of parties were in the process of being formed. One coalition, binding the EDU, EDC and ENDO, and another, between a couple of the Somali fronts, had just been concluded. It was at the explicit consent of the leaders of these two coalitions that other fellow coalition delegates signed the memorandum on their behalf as well. To this day, no organization whose signatory was supposedly forged has complained to that effect. During the deliberation on the memorandum, when the issue of forgery was first raised, one of the concerned delegates wanted to speak but his request was not acknowledged by the Chair.
19. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1992), p. 36.
20. Ottaway, M. "The Ethiopian Transition : Democratization or New Authoritarianism?", *The Express* (17 Nov. 1995) : 3.
21. Ibid. p. 3.
22. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1992). p. 4.

Part II

**THE NATURE OF THE
LIBERATION FRONTS:**

**A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO
THE DEMOCRATIZATION PACT**

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many writers on Ethiopia's politics have tended to blame the country's lack of experience with democracy as the main obstacle to the implementation of the democratization Charter. That this factor had a considerable influence on the outcome of the effort to bring about a democratic change cannot be questioned. The rulers of Ethiopia have always come from the north, where the absence of democratic culture is much more pronounced than in the south (as was elaborated on in the previous chapter). The emphasis on the absence of democratic experience, however, threatens to conceal another factor that was, and continues to be, perhaps much more determinative. And that is a combination of the party-building ideology and military strategy that was adopted by—and hence shaped the mind-set of—the leaders of the liberation fronts and the practices and structures resulting from them. It is, of course, obvious that this was in turn influenced by the ambient traditional political culture in which most of these leaders grew up and started their political career. Yet, the overlaying of a new veneer on this prevailing substratum did introduce a new element which, if overlooked, would reduce the weight of the obstacles facing the democratization attempt. Even more importantly, any future attempt to revive the exercise would be doomed were this factor not given due attention and the necessary mechanisms for its gradual removal not drawn up. Thus in this section, we will focus on those factors that helped to shape the mind-set of the leaders of the liberation fronts as well as the practices and structures that they crafted during the years of struggle.

The TPLF, in collaboration with the EPLF, succeeded in capturing the capital, Addis Ababa, on May 28, 1991. This naturally resulted in the TPLF forming the administration that hosted the July 1991 Conference, to which more than twenty other groups

were invited. Thus, as the main actor, TPLF's preparedness to genuinely abide by the terms of the Charter can easily be considered as the determining ingredient for the success of the entire exercise. This makes it essential to investigate the nature of this front and the mind-set of its leaders. One cannot, however, start understanding the TPLF without looking at the EPLF also and how the two fronts related to each other. The previous Ethiopian Government was not alone in, for years, treating the TPLF just as an extension of the EPLF south of the Mereb river (the arbitrary boundary between Ethiopia and Eritrea). We need not concern ourselves with this controversy. That a very close relationship existed between the leaders of the two fronts cannot, however, be questioned and needs to be realized by all those dealing with the present Ethiopian political situation. One must not forget, on the other hand, that cooperation and competition constitute the opposite sides of the same coin, particularly in hierarchical political systems. Thus TPLF/EPLF relations, whether in the form of cooperation or competition, will continue to have impact on the politics of the two countries for as long as they remain dominant. In addition, due to the ethnic and historical intimacy of the two forces and the entities that they are dominating, changes in one will have consequences for the other.

Many of the key leaders of the EPLF and the entire TPLF leadership come from the Tigrinya-speaking people of northern Ethiopia. The identity of the two groups is so intimate as to render it almost impossible for an outsider to distinguish an Eritrean from a Tigrean. Many persons of Tigrean background had joined the two main Eritrean fronts, i.e. the ELF and the EPLF. How many of these still remain in these fronts is not easy to state. Similarly, many Eritreans participated in the formation of the TPLF. Some of these today hold key positions in the TPLF and its Amhara surrogate party, the former EPDM that has now taken on the appellation Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). This overlap of personnel aside, the EPLF had considerable influence on the formation and growth of the TPLF. It trained thousands of TPLF troops. It continued to give technical

and military support even at a time when relations between the two fronts were strained in the latter part of the 1980s. Such support continued right to the end of the war and after its conclusion. In addition, the TPLF was able to, and actually did, copy all the knowledge and experience accumulated by the EPLF.

The EPLF was lucky in attracting, at a critical time in its history, a large number of Eritrean students from the secondary schools, other institutions of higher learning, and universities, both at home and abroad. Starting particularly in the mid-1970s, educated Eritreans flocked to the EPLF field in large numbers. This group of educated manpower was further augmented by many employees of private and government institutions that found it necessary to escape to the field from government harassment and physical liquidation. Similarly, many Eritrean members of the various branches of the Ethiopian armed forces and almost the entire Israeli-trained counter-insurgency commando unit also went over to the EPLF around the same time. This enabled EPLF leaders to tap the knowledge and experience of such a wide range of trained human-power in fashioning a superb administrative, political, and military organization. One must give these leaders the credit for effectively employing such a windfall of human resource.

The absence of a linguistic or cultural barrier enabled TPLF leaders to directly copy much of the knowledge and experience that the EPLF was able to mobilize because of the above. Anybody observing the relation between the two fronts in the early 1980s would have been struck by its similarity to that existing between a younger and an elder brother. The TPLF appeared to mimic and to try to outdo the EPLF in every aspect. It was only after the souring of relations between the two fronts was made public in the latter part of the 1980s that the TPLF started to throwoff this image of a junior brother and an extension of the EPLF. We are raising all these in order to underline the need to explore the political environment that shaped the nature of the EPLF as well, if we are to grasp the thought processes of TPLF leaders.

In order to do this we will hereunder focus on two ways in which Lenin's strategy for conducting revolutions influenced the two fronts. These are: (1) his prescription that revolutions in the modern era cannot be conducted directly by but only on behalf of the oppressed, and (2) that secrecy should be given precedence over open participation due to the need to strategize the revolution in a very hostile environment. From there we will go on to see how Mao Tse-Tung's teachings on social engineering and fusing political and military affairs affected the thinking of these leaders. And then we will see how these leaders' ability to manipulate humanitarian relief assistance during the 1980s Cross Border Operations entrenched their influence in society to unprecedented extent. Finally, we will see how in these situations the past rules the present and one tends to invoke the memory of the dead in order to stay on course.

Chapter 3

THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM LENIN

REVOLUTION ON BEHALF OF THE OPPRESSED

The October Revolution that broke out in Czarist Russia in 1917 continued to influence the thinking of revolutionaries throughout the world for close to seventy years. In one particular aspect, how that revolution was articulated and carried out stands in stark contrast to how the previous revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were carried out. In comparison to the October Revolution, the revolutionary agenda of its predecessors was assumed to be relatively more comprehensible to the social sector that was its intended beneficiary. The bulk of the emerging bourgeois class that led those previous social upheavals that ended feudalism and absolutism understood, relatively easily, the aim of the revolution and was thus a conscious participant. Whether the working class can similarly grasp the aim of socialist revolution and equally consciously participate in it was the subject of a heated debate among the revolutionary intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the most influential participants in that debate was the great Russian revolutionary, V. I. Lenin. The views he expressed during that period were to influence the thinking of revolutionary leaders throughout the world for close to three quarters of a century. In particular, his writings

were extensively read by the Ethiopian student radicals of the 1960s. They were attracted to his political philosophy for a number of reasons.

A striking similarity existed between Czarist Russia and the Ethiopia of Emperor Haile Selassie's era. In both of them, new social classes were living side by side with others that had been phased out in the more "developed" parts of the world. Hence, the intelligentsia of both countries were eager to speed up the erasure of the two country's features that did not coincide with "modernity." In both countries, members of this social sector, more than others, displayed the biggest embarrassment and impatience with the backwardness of their society and political order. In addition, the ethnic heterogeneity of Czarist Russia roughly paralleled that of Ethiopia. The possibility that the communities alienated from the state and its functionaries could champion the cause of eradicating autocratic rule posed as a challenge to the privileged elite of both countries. The intelligentsia of the privileged communities of both countries were worried that such a scenario could result in the disintegration of the empires that they wished to "modernize", preserve, and inherit. They were convinced that such a likelihood could be averted only by channeling these communities' desire for change "in the right direction." Saving the empire while carrying out a program that would enable it "to catch up" with the developed countries figured prominently in the political agenda of the educated elite of both countries. Hence, Ethiopian student radicals found the teachings of Lenin much more applicable to the reality that they wished to change than did their counterparts in many other African societies. Here we will recall, very briefly, some of the lessons that were drawn from Lenin's writings.

One of Lenin's writings that were extensively read by all those entertaining revolution in Ethiopia during that time was entitled *What is to be Done?*² and concerned how to organize and implement Social Democratic Revolution. In it, Lenin dealt with the role of the working class in the task of strategizing and leading the revolution. At the risk of oversimplifying, the essence of his conclusion was a strong rejection of the possibility of creating a

“Party of the Working Class” and a forceful espousal of a “Party for the Working Class.” He was convinced that the working class could not spontaneously arrive at the comprehensive ideology and strategy needed to achieve socialist revolution. He concludes:

We have said that there could not have been Social Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that is necessary to combine in unions, fighting employers, and strive to compel government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representative of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social Democracy arose independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of the thought among the revolutionary intelligentsia.¹

Mapping the revolutionary course and ensuring that the working class movement stays on it could thus be entrusted only to a group of committed revolutionary intellectuals. They were made to view themselves as the “saviors” of not only their downtrodden compatriots but of all humanity by leading them to “the promised land” of a new order free from inequality and exploitation. Members of one class openly considering the liberation of another as their exclusive responsibility is what sets the Leninist strategy for revolution apart from all those that preceded socialist revolution.

This group, in order to lead the working class, must shoulder the responsibility of continuously raising the consciousness of the workers. Lenin again and again returned to elaborating the duty of the revolutionary party as being: “We must take-up actively the

political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness."² This task was entrusted to the propagandist. And Lenin envisioned the challenge facing the propagandist to be a formidable one as he wrote:

the propagandist, dealing with, say, the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalistic nature of crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word, he must present many ideas, so many, indeed that they will be understood as an integral whole *only by (comparatively) few persons*.³ (emphasis added.)

Thus the party trains the propagandist who in turn shoulders the responsibility of shedding light on all the complexities of society and the course that should be followed in ending unjust exploitative order. Only a few are expected to understand the process comprehensively. This inevitably results in an ever-narrowing circle of those who have a better knowledge of the entire process, with the working class and other even more backward social sectors (such as the peasantry) situated at its outer rim. The most knowledgeable and committed thus serve as the nucleus and the brain of the revolutionary organization. This nucleus was often given the title the "Central Committee." Lenin's contemporary and bitter critic, Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, aptly concluded that in this set-up, "The Central Committee would be the only thinking element in the party. All other groupings would be its executive limbs."⁴

Most of the revolutions that were attempted after the October Revolution were carried out in societies even more backward by comparison with the Russia of the early twentieth century. The peasantry thus increasingly replaced the supposedly more sophisticated working class as the object of mobilization. Consequently, the gap separating the level of political awareness of the leaders from that of the target community continued to widen. In addi-

tion, social changes were being attempted in a world that had grown even more complex than at the time of Lenin's writing. The division of the world into two antagonistic poles imposed on revolutionary leaders the need to conduct their work within a global context. On the contrary, the peasant had the natural inclination of being very parochial and was, more often than not, unaware of happenings in the adjoining districts let alone the entire world. The challenge of dealing with the peasant's parochial tendencies while fitting their revolutionary work within a global context rendered the role of Cold War revolutionary leaders much more onerous than it had been at the time of Lenin. Just as Lenin found it necessary to conduct revolution on behalf of the working class, more recent revolutionaries have found it unavoidable to articulate and lead social change on behalf of the peasantry and other oppressed classes. Since the peasantry was considered to be even less able than the proletariat to have a comprehensive understanding of what is best for it, the revolutionary leaders had to persuade it to engage in certain activities even when the peasantry found them incomprehensible or even unpalatable.

This is the thinking that served as the foundation of the revolutionary strategy of the fronts that were fighting against the Ethiopian Government starting in the 1960s. The practical application of Lenin's strategy succeeded in northern Ethiopia, perhaps more than anywhere else in the Horn of Africa. A similar attempt by the Oromos, Somalis, and Southern Sudanese to duplicate the Leninist political structure was not as successful. Another similarity that northern Ethiopia shares with Czarist Russia is perhaps partly responsible for this happening, namely, the influence of the Orthodox Church in the lives of northern Ethiopians which roughly resembles that of its counterpart in Russia. Ever since the fourth century, the Orthodox Church has served as the main repository of knowledge in northern Ethiopia, as it did in Russia since the eleventh century. The ability to think and unravel the mysteries of the Creator as the well as of creation radiated from the Patriarch down through the Abunas to the local clergy and the deacons. Education and the keeping of chronicles was delegated to the

Church. The rest of the society left the task of intellectual work to this designated group of thinkers and followed their informed instructions. It is possible that the more recent revolutionary leaders simply succeeded in partly transferring the society's trust from the institution of the Church to themselves and the front.

The Oromo and Somali leaders, in contrast, could not do the same. In situations in which this style of revolutionary work took root, each success scored by the fronts in the political and military endeavors continued to raise the influence of the leaders to higher and higher levels. The rank-and-file and the rest of their community were led to place an increasing amount of trust in the wisdom of these leaders. This meshing of the Leninist formula and the prevailing attitude of the society lie at the root of the greater-than-life image of the leaders of the TPLF and EPLF. In tapping even such apparently apolitical activities as relief work to deepen their hold on society to unprecedented levels, the northern Ethiopian liberation fronts have few parallels elsewhere, if any. We will deal with this in a later section.

The resulting differentiation between the "brain" and "limbs" (foreseen by Luxemburg) achieved the highest level in the EPLF perhaps followed by TPLF. This was manifested in many ways. For example, an American friend of the EPLF, Dan Connell, observed that EPLF members displayed "an unsettling level of rhetorical uniformity about everything."⁵ EPLF's bitter rival, the ELF, also considered itself a Marxist-Leninist organization. But in practice the "guerrillas within the ELF appeared to have more diversity of outlook than those in the EPLF,"⁶ as witnessed by Connell. Hence, the members of the fronts that were more successful in implementing the Leninist organizational strategy tended not only to act as one person but to speak as one, too. This is an indication of the existence of a practice in which issues for discussion are identified, and decisions reached at the top concerning them are passed down to the rank-and-file. These stands are supposedly based on a scientific analysis of the issues and are thus considered to constitute absolute truths. Any deviating view, both within and without the organization, is vigorously combatted. Be-

liefs and practices of the society or members that appear opposed to these truths and the general political agenda of the front are systematically demolished. The ideas of competing forces are usually subjected to the most intense criticism and merciless ridicule. The stand of the fronts was held up as the only truth and winning formula. Such an impression is continuously drummed into the minds of the members and the society until it becomes almost second nature.

The implication of this situation for effecting a revision of stands is quite obvious. Why a change is needed and how it does not constitute a departure from the truths originally established as scientific becomes even more difficult to sell to the rank-and-file than introducing a new idea. For example, once an organization is identified as being “reactionary” or “narrow-nationalist,” it becomes well nigh impossible to have any dealings with it other than justifying this contact as a first stage in the plan of its eventual elimination.

The TPLF faced the problem emanating from feeding such “scientific” truths to its followers when it found it necessary to suddenly put on a new liberal democratic image towards the end of the war. According to the teachings of such scientifically established truths those social sectors that are classified as “enemies of the revolution” are to be denied their democratic rights. This is the essence of the TPLF version of democracy, which is described as “Revolutionary Democracy”—a phrase which is imbedded in the title of the group that it created, the “Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front” and its ideological organ, entitled *“Revolutionary Democracy.”* But the growing acceptance of the TPLF by Western powers brought with itself the need to espouse a more participatory political system. In political organizations like the TPLF, the launching of even minor political or military activity is normally preceded by an extensive campaign to prepare the ground. A shift as radical as promoting a participatory political system would have required a more sustained and lengthy campaign. The rate at which the Dergue’s position was eroding, leading to an equally sudden growth of TPLF interaction with the

Western powers, meant that the speed with which public declarations were being made started to outpace the normal practice of internally preparing the ground. As a result, Meles was subjected to a certain amount of grilling by the delegates to the last EPRDF congress that was convened just before the Dergue's overthrow. He was asked to explain why "reactionaries" and "narrow-nationalists" would suddenly be allowed to compete in the politics of the country. A video tape on the session in which he had to deal with this issue was televised after the Dergue's overthrow. What actually was discussed in the closed sessions of the congress is anybody's guess. If TPLF leaders did genuinely make a shift in their definition of what constitutes democracy, then they failed to transmit the same to the rank-and-file. For the practice at the lower echelons stayed on the original course even at the time when the top ranks were talking about sharing the political space with other forces. It is easier to speculate that the adoption of a liberal democratic stance was sold as a temporary tactic to buy time while conditions are prepared for the elimination of those classified as "reactionary" or "narrow-nationalist" forces.

Such conjecture aside, the TPLF was giving two contradictory signals to the peoples of Ethiopia and concerned foreigners. On the one hand, by inviting autonomous groups to come forward to take part in the political process, it hinted that it was interested in a participatory political system. By, at the same time, restricting the movement of such groups particularly outside the capital it was sending the directly opposite message. The OLF, as the second strongest member of the transitional administration, was in a better position to put up a more meaningful competition. It administered some areas of western and eastern Oromia. In addition, it was able to assign its activists to almost all the rest of the Oromo-inhabited areas of the empire. This situation created a more sustained friction between the two fronts until the OLF was squeezed out of the legal forum. Many hold the OLF as equally responsible for the break-up of the cooperation that was designed to bring about a transition to democracy. The grounds on which such a conclusion is drawn are many and contentious, but we

need not involve ourselves with that issue here. We can, however, cite many incidents which lend credence to TPLF determination to keep the countryside as its exclusive operational area. The experience of the small and therefore less threatening Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), which could not be accused of the same faults leveled against the OLF, would suffice. SLM's effort to hold a party congress in the capital of its home region, Awasa, was deliberately disrupted by TPLF troops. The Sidama leader—who was also one of its delegates to the interim legislature, the Council of Representatives—was fired upon. Similar trips to their home areas by the leaders of other communities were also frustrated in one manner or another. Having a permanent presence in one's constituency, in the form of a political office, was even less thinkable. One can easily draw the conclusion that participatory politics was never adopted by the TPLF and the "coalition" that it created; i.e., the EPRDF. This is the only way we can explain the serious gap between the organization's public pronouncements and its actual practice. It also meant that the TPLF never engaged in the re-education of its operatives that the apparent shift of policy to a more participatory one would have demanded. Hence, TPLF operatives continued to view their front as the only legitimate vanguard of all peoples and their version of democracy as the only acceptable alternative. Consequently, they stuck to their conviction that opposition to TPLF was opposition to democracy, peace, and the interest of the "people."

REVOLUTION IN A HOSTILE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Let us now turn our attention to another, even more important lesson drawn by the leaders of liberation fronts from the teachings of Lenin: conducting social and political change within a hostile environment. Lenin depicted the very hostile environment under which the October Revolution was being attempted when he wrote: "We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost

constantly under fire.”⁷ The picture that he painted in another country and another era was very applicable to the revolutionary forces that were establishing themselves in the Ethiopia of the 1960s and 1970s. The forces that they could point out as foes actually turned out to be even more numerous.

These fronts came into existence at a time when the whole world indeed appeared hostile to their very survival. Many people who have visited their base areas have been struck with the hostility of the physical environment in which they established their headquarters. To the leaders of these fronts, the hostility of the political environment was even more menacing. Fending off the military aggression of the regime was just the tip of the iceberg. Foiling the machinations of its intelligence organs figured even more importantly in the pre-occupation of the leaders. As students of Mao Tse-tung, they were convinced that victory could be achieved only if they were able to “make the enemy blind and deaf by sealing his eyes and ears and drive his commanders to distraction by creating confusion in their minds.”⁸ This could be accomplished only if two things were made possible: firstly, the secret of the front needed to be guarded with the utmost vigilance; secondly, the enemy had to be penetrated and fed misinformation. Defending oneself and going on the offensive in the intelligence field was drummed into the minds of all members of the fronts.

If the task was restricted to defending oneself from the activities of the regime alone, the mission would have been much simpler. But the job was further complicated by the perceived involvement of one or the other global intelligence agencies. When the Ethiopian Government was in alliance with the USA, the CIA was considered to be engaged in subverting the fronts. This was a common assumption of all left-leaning groups of the time, including even student movements. US involvement in foiling the 1960 coup d'état was always referred to as an important precedent. In addition, the US then had a military base in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and was thus believed to have a direct stake in foiling the growth of insurgency in the area. How much effort this agency actually exerted in monitoring the growth of the guerrilla move-

ments or the growing student radicalism is of course not openly known. What is important is that any anti-government group considered itself a target of CIA espionage and took measures to defend itself. Naturally, the ability of the agency was taken to be phenomenal and thus required extra vigilance to guard against it. When the USSR replaced the USA as Ethiopia's patron, it was easily assumed that the KGB had stepped into the shoes of the CIA.

Geopolitics behooved another power to supposedly spy on the guerrilla forces. That is the state of Israel. Israel has an obvious vested interest in averting the conversion of the Red Sea into an Arab/Moslem lake. Successive Ethiopian Governments were able to gain Israeli assistance in various forms by harping on this interest. Thus, according to one report: "By 1966, Israel had a 100-man military mission in Ethiopia training an estimated 1,000 troops a year in counterinsurgency warfare."⁹ In addition, Israel was believed to be involved in suppressing the Oromo movement in southern Oromia around the same period. The intelligence repercussion of the perception of alliance existing between the Israeli and Ethiopian governments was such that all opponents of the Ethiopian regime considered themselves targets also of the formidable Israeli intelligence networks. Thus, defending oneself from possible subversion by the Mossad and allied services was added to the guerrilla leaders' already monumental intelligence requirements.

On top of all of this, even potential friends had to be guarded against. Looking at the case of Eritrea will help us to understand this much better. Eritrean leaders of the early 1960s latched on to the prevailing Arab political agenda of the time in order to mobilize support for their cause. This had two aspects to it. There was a strong current among Arab political circles to realize the unification of all Arab countries. Eritrean leaders, hence, tried to assume an Arab identity for Eritrea and hinted of its eventual integration into the Arab nation after freedom from Ethiopia was achieved. In this way, they attempted to make the liberation of Eritrea the responsibility also of Arab statesmen. Secondly, the Arab/Mos-

lem world was opposed to the presence of Israel in the Middle East. Israel's alliance with Ethiopia encouraged Eritrean leaders to also harp on the anti-Zionist current of the Arab political mood. Hence, the Eritrean struggle was situated within the anti-Zionist camp as well as the Arab nationalist one. This approach did enable Eritrean nationalists to mobilize a substantial amount of material and political support from the Arab and Islamic world.

This advantage, however, came with a considerable amount of risk to those interacting with the Arab powers. The Arab nations were perhaps more divided than united. Even such a pan-Arab group as the Arab Baath Socialist Party, for example, was divided into its antagonistic Syrian and Iraqi branches. These two groups and a number of other pan-Arab parties had the tendency to implant their agents inside all movements or states with which they came into contact. What reportedly happened to the ELF represents the end result of such a process. When the ELF disintegrated into numerous splinter groups in the 1980s, the prior existence within its ranks of persons paying allegiance to the various pan-Arab parties (such as the two wings of the Arab Baath Socialist Party and the numerous divisions of the Nasserites) was extensively talked about more openly than before. The EPLF, in contrast, was able to avert such a penetration by these forces. This could have happened only because the EPLF exercised vigilance against penetration while staying in touch with friendly Arab powers and benefiting from their support. Guarding against penetration by even one's supporters added another dimension to the intelligence work of the concerned liberation fronts.

The danger coming from fellow compatriots could be even more threatening to one's survival and success. Such a situation becomes particularly relevant in cases where more than one guerrilla group start competing to champion the cause of liberation. Again, the experience of the EPLF epitomizes this kind of predicament. The original ELF split into many factions starting in the late 1960s. The ELF-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC) and the EPLF remained as the two strongest ones until the early 1980s, when the former started losing ground. During this entire time, the relation

between these two had oscillated between periods of peaceful co-existence and murderous in-fighting. However, maintaining a defensive posture against possible infiltration by the antagonistic front had to remain constant. It is possible that the ELF-RC did attempt to infiltrate its main rival, but without much success. EPLF's success in infiltrating the ELF-RC is, however, clear from the numerous ELF accusations leveled against the EPLF. In one such accusation, the ELF-RC blamed EPLF "secret cells", known as *Wahiyos*, for conducting "an intensive propaganda campaign, including inside the ELF rank and file" in order to disrupt some of its program as early as 1976¹⁰ (emphasis added). This is a good example of succeeding in guarding against penetration while you engage in the infiltration and subversion of your opponent.

The image of being "surrounded on all sides by enemies" and of advancing "almost constantly under fire" that Lenin painted was thus a very real situation for these liberation fronts. How should one go about organizing and carrying out a revolution under such a hostile surrounding? Lenin prescribed the adoption of secrecy as the foundation of a successful organization of revolution. He does not mince words in recommending this kind of organization when he states: "Secrecy is such a necessary condition for this kind of organization that all other conditions (number and selection of members, functions, etc.) must be made to conform to it. It would be extremely naive indeed, therefore, to fear the charge that we Social Democrats desire to create a conspiratorial organization."¹¹ His own experience—in the "student study circles" that earned him some time in Siberian exile and perhaps the events that resulted in the execution of his own brother—must have led him to make such a conclusion. He recalled how the style of work of the students had "an immediate and complete result, because this open warfare was not the result of a systematic and carefully thought-out and gradually prepared plan for a prolonged and stubborn struggle, but simply the result of spontaneous growth of the traditional study circle work: because, naturally, the police, in almost every case, knew the principal leaders of the local movement, since they had already 'gained reputation' for themselves in their

student days, and the police waited only for the right moment to make their raid."¹²

Lenin thus was concerned mainly about a single "police force," while the liberation fronts could list many more antagonistic agencies that they had to contend with. If Lenin advised the exercise of secrecy even under his less besieged situation, how much more should its exercise be stressed by those who consider themselves the target of more numerous and sophisticated foes.

Lenin then went on to describe the consequences of such a secret style of work for democratic practice. Under the prevailing atmosphere, he dispensed with the defining features of democratic practice, such as publicity and open election to all offices. He concludes:

that "broad democracy" in Party organization, amidst the gloom of the autocracy and the domination of the gendarmerie, is nothing more than *a useless and harmful toy*. ... [his emphasis] It is a useless toy because, in point of fact, no revolutionary organization has ever practiced, or could practise, *broad* democracy, however, it may have desired to do so. It is a harmful toy because any attempt to practise "the broad democratic principle" will simply facilitate the work of the police in carrying out large-scale raids, will perpetuate the prevailing primitiveness, and will divert the thoughts of practical workers from the serious and pressing task of training themselves to become professional revolutionaries to that of drawing up detailed "paper" rules for the election systems.¹³

He replaced this "useless and harmful" variety with a superior type of democracy by concluding: "The only serious organizational principle for active workers of our movement should be the *strictest secrecy*, the strictest selection of members and the training of professional revolutionaries. Given these qualities, something even more than 'democratism' would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries"¹⁴(*italics added*).

Rosa Luxemburg described Lenin's version of democracy as "pitiless centralism" leading to "The necessity of selecting, and constituting as a separate corps, all the active revolutionists as distinguished from the unorganized, though revolutionary mass surrounding this elite."¹⁵ In addition to turning the Central Committee into the brain that commands the limbs of the party, she identifies a second consequence emanating from this organizational strategy. "Here we have a second peculiarity of conspiratorial centralism—the absolute and blind submission of the party sections to the will of the center, and the extension of this authority to all parts of the organization."¹⁶

Lenin justified his style of organization on the basis of his obsession to end "the prevailing primitiveness" and the need to "settle accounts with the shame and curse of Russia."¹⁷ He was addressing a similar mood with which many educated Ethiopians of the 1960s and 1970s were afflicted. His ability to go one stage further to elevate his version of democracy to a superior status, of course, became even more reassuring. Once again, his ideas coincided much more closely with the political tradition of northern Ethiopians than that of the southern peoples. A strict hierarchy pervades all aspects of social interaction in northern Ethiopia, starting from the family. Total control of society and political processes are perceived as the ultimate objective of exercising power. And Lenin's success in reconciling rigid centralized control with a new form of "democracy" became music to the ears of the new generation of political leaders emerging from that milieu. Lenin's teachings regarding elections also had clear resonance with the tradition in northern Ethiopia. This is a region where the concept of electing leaders did not exist at all. Lenin's ability to describe the "selection" of trusted followers by the omniscient Central Committee as a superior kind of democracy to one in which a relatively less predictable "election" occurs thus fell on a very fertile ground. Hence, the TPLF and like organizations can only go into an election whose outcome is predetermined.

TPLF members were acquainted only with the Leninist variety of democracy. That it is scientific and foolproof was drummed

into their minds by the leaders. Thus, practicing any other form of democracy was considered not only a regression but also engaging in something that is both harmful and useless. Those in leadership position, of course, would have a direct vested interest in permanently maintaining this kind of order. Conducting "selection" in secrecy coupled with the set-up in which the leaders constitute the thinking organ of the body politic makes their hold on power permanent as well as completely unquestionable. They exercise the ultimate authority on making the "selection" and then calling it an election. And without opening up the internal space to a more open system of election, there is no way that they could tolerate a genuine free and fair election in the public domain. Thus, their publicly pronounced decisions to abide by the results of a fair and free election ran afoul of the style of work that became entrenched during the struggle. Only a considerable amount of pressure could have persuaded them to change this type of politics; something that was missing, as we will see below. In particular, we will see later on how signals from the US Government encouraged TPLF leaders to stick to the type of politics that does not augur well for pluralism and genuine democracy.

To be fair, perhaps the same could apply to the OLF to a limited extent. Yet, there are many reasons why OLF leaders were willing to try out and accept a fair and free election. To start with, the OLF, even if it also aspired to create Marxist-Leninist structures and style of work, had much more ground yet to cover by the time the war ended. Because of a complicated history that is beyond the scope of this work, the evolution of OLF's organization was still at its formative stage at the end of the anti-Dergue struggle. That was just one factor that stood in the way of having a full-blown Marxist-Leninist organizational structure. The content of OLF's rhetoric itself posed perhaps the more important constraint in fashioning a very centralized structure. Reviving traditional Oromo political structure and practice figures prominently in OLF's political agenda. Attempting to at the same time create a very centralized control would have been contrary to this publicly declared objective of the struggle. Left to themselves, Oromos

would have done everything possible to contain the creation of centralism, a tendency which was already manifesting itself in the OLF's organizational history.

Perhaps even more importantly, OLF leaders were much more certain of winning at least the June 1992 district and local elections. In the ethnically charged political atmosphere of the time, those Oromos who were burdened with association with the TPLF appeared to suffer from an obvious handicap; thus making OLF's electoral victory relatively certain. And winning such an election would have had the immediate effect of raising OLF's influence within the front and society to new heights. Even losing with a respectable margin in a relatively fair and free election would not have derogated from OLF leaders' stature as a similar situation would have happened to the TPLF. The alternative of returning to the much more risky and drawn-out process of armed struggle would not have been appealing in any manner. Thus, in the case of the OLF, practicing even a flawed democracy would have appeared less risky than returning to the armed struggle. It was the total absence of even such a flawed democratic practice that made the resumption of armed struggle inevitable.

Communist-like secretiveness has always been one of the attributes of northern Ethiopian societies, as observed by Christopher Clapham: "Ethiopian suspicion is proverbial, and brings with it a secretiveness, a reserve and a tendency to intrigue no less suited to a communist than to a court administration."¹⁸ When combined with Lenin's injunction, the already existing tradition of secretiveness assumed new heights in the TPLF. Even other Tigreans were struck with the degree of secretiveness practiced by the TPLF. One of them, the BBC correspondent in Addis Ababa, Abraham Fisseha, once described the TPLF as "a most secretive organization" during an interview on the BBC. Guarding one's secrets with the utmost vigilance is just one side of the coin. Invading the privacy of others and manipulating it to one's advantage is part and parcel of this kind of set-up. The experience of the ELF-RC and the EPLF, to which reference has been made above, attests to this situation. During the transition, the privacy of par-

ticipating organizations was not exempted from TPLF invasion. Naturally, this created a feeling of vulnerability by those who found themselves naked in the eyes of the TPLF.

We have referred to Lenin's dispensation with "broad democracy" and his dismissal of the accusation of "conspiracy." We conclude this section by recalling his rebuttal of the charge of "intolerance." In this regard, too, he does not mince words when he states: "The authors of the Economist letter in unison with Rabocheya Dyelo, inveigh against intolerance that is characteristic of the infancy of the movement. To this we reply: Yes, our movement is indeed in its infancy, and in order that it may grow up faster, it must become imbued with intolerance against those who retard its growth by their subservience to spontaneity."¹⁹ That a revolutionary movement should treat any tendency or movement that hinders its blossoming with total intolerance is fully established. In fact, conceding ground to an opponent is seen as nothing short of surrender. Making a compromise is a dirty game in this style of politics. There appears to be no middle ground; either you surrender or the opponent falls in line with your position. For groups that internalized this stand, its implications for alliance formation is self-evident. Other groups become candidates for absorption, failing which they are liable to be physically eliminated. In this kind of practice there is no room for genuine coalition.

Eliminating unabsorbable groups was executed by the EPLF when it drove the ELF-RC out of Eritrea. The door was, however, left open for individual members to join the ranks of the victorious front, no doubt with their tails between their legs. The TPLF carried out its own version of physically liquidating a competitor when it, according to rumors, killed every member of the TLF in a truly Byzantine manner. Starting a relationship that initially looked like a coalition but in practice is more akin to subordination manifested itself in the TPLF handling of the former EPDM, today's ANDM. TPLF's handiwork, the PDOs, are of course in no position to even entertain entering into a relationship of partnership with their creator. In a situation in which the fashioning of a hierarchical structure is equated with coalition for-

mation, the fate of autonomous and self-assertive groups like the OLF was inevitable. A stubborn adherence to independence and assertiveness by this Front and almost all its members necessitated not only its liquidation but also that of its followers. To this day, the TPLF has not found a single former OLF combatant pliable enough to be integrated into its surrogate organization.

The lessons learned from Lenin's writing thus imbued the northern fronts with a staunch commitment to secrecy, conspiracy, and intolerance. Added to this, a top-down approach to social change was promoted into an object of faith. Hence, a single thinking organ sits at the top and directs the affairs of the society by casting a web of control to envelope every important social sector. This web of control and monitoring is fine-tuned again and again to continuously refine the efficacy of the mechanism that transmits information to the center and its decisions outwards. The need to monitor and report on one's surrounding is drummed into the minds of the individuals and groups that are situated at any location on the web. This is done until this task takes on the form of an almost instinctive reaction. In this sense, intelligence takes a very prominent role in the affairs of these kinds of structures. Although a specialized department is created to coordinate this function, that reporting on one's surrounding becomes the responsibility of every member puts this type of organizational system in a category of its own. One can hence conclude that the front itself becomes one huge intelligence machinery. One way by which the continuous enhancement of this machinery's efficiency is assured is by giving the ordinary members overlapping assignments. A member, in addition to carrying on an openly designated task, is normally given other secret missions too. One particular way that this is attempted is by creating a clandestine "vanguard Marxist-Leninist" party to lead the rest of the front's members and society at large.

The EPLF, for example, used to be accused by other Eritrean fronts of having created a secret ML party called the Eritrean Peoples Revolutionary Party. As this was never openly declared by the EPLF, the accusation remains unsubstantiated. The TPLF,

however, did create the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, the MLLT, in the mid-1980s. Under the prevailing global situation today, playing up the existence of such a body currently is not of advantage to the TPLF. Still, former TPLF members continue to testify to the survival of this “core” albeit in a clandestine manner. One must realize that ideology has little to do with the possible continuation of this body. Its efficacy in building a counter-checking monitoring mechanism is so important as to make its abandonment less likely. Those who have observed TPLF style of work have, knowingly or unknowingly, pointed to practices that are based on the existence of such a body. One such observer, Theodore Vestal described TPLF organizational and control strategy as placing “a box within a box.”²⁰

The overall result of Lenin’s style of political work is unmistakable. The revolution is turned into the property of a narrow circle that designates itself as the Central Committee. The primary beneficiaries of its outcome, “the unorganized, though revolutionary mass” were turned merely into a material out of which the self-styled revolutionary leaders attempt to mold a force to battle anachronism and “injustice.” This is not the place to make a value judgment on the merits, or otherwise, of this set-up. How it impacted on the promise to share the political space with others organized on the basis of other strategies is what concerns us here. As touched upon above, some of the obvious obstacles emanating from this style of struggle help to demonstrate the peculiar difficulties facing the Ethiopian democratization Charter.

NOTES

1. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? : Burning Question of Our Movement*, (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 143.
2. Ibid. p. 164.
3. Ibid. p. 172.
4. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Westport, Conn : Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 85.

5. D. Connell, *Against All Odds : A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution*, (Lawrenceville, NJ :Red Sea Press, 1993), p. 42.
6. Ibid. p. 75.
7. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? : Burning Question of Our Movement*, (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 126.
8. Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War*, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol II (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1965), p. 166.
9. D. Connell, *Against All Odds : A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1993), p. 23.
10. An ELF pamphlet dated 1976 p. 69.
11. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? : Burning Question of Our Movement*, (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 227.
12. Ibid. p. 199.
13. Ibid. p. 229 - 130.
14. Ibid. p. 231.
15. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Westport, Conn : Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 84.
16. Ibid. p. 87.
17. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? : Burning Question of Our Movement*, (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 254.
18. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 23.
19. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? : Burning Question of Our Movement* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 152.
20. "An Analysis of the New Constitution of Ethiopia and the Process of its Adoption" by Theodore Vestal, a paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association in Toronto, Ontario, 4 Nov. 1994 p. 21.

Chapter 4

THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM MAO TSE-TUNG

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL ENGINEERING AND THE FUSION OF MILITARY AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS

The person that perhaps ranks second to Lenin in terms of influencing the thinking of revolutionaries throughout the world in recent decades is Mao Tse-tung. Some of the key leaders of the EPLF were reportedly trained in China during the late 1960s.¹ Thus, they had a first-hand experience with the results of effecting social and political change by applying the teachings of Mao Tse-tung. Even those who did not have this kind of contact with China or had the determination of going into the countryside to try out the teachings of Mao liked to study and quote his works. Maoist phrase-mongering was a necessary sign of being a “revolutionary.” For the more serious revolutionaries the effectiveness of Mao’s writings *On Protracted War* was borne out in daily practice. The TPLF continued to consider itself a Maoist organization until the middle of the 1980s when it decided that it had actually surpassed the Chinese Communists. Since Mao’s teachings served as one of the factors that shaped the thinking and style of work of its leaders for a large part of TPLF’s existence, briefly recalling the content of this teaching is essential to shed some light on the mind-set of these leaders. We will try to do this only to gauge the extent to

which Mao's teachings impacted on the desire to make a transition to democracy in the post-Dergue Ethiopia.

Mao Tse-tung glorified the practice of armed revolution. In the now world-famous *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, he is cited as concluding that "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of issues by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries."² This is so because, as distinct from other kinds of war, revolutionary warfare has a dual function, as Mao stated in *On Protracted War*: "But we are in a revolutionary war, and revolutionary war is an antitoxin which not only eliminates the enemy's poison but also purges us of our own filth."³ Thus he created a linkage between defeating the enemy and purging the revolutionary organization and society of dirt. The enemy that his party was fighting at the time was Japan, which had unquestionable superiority in the quality and quantity of its armament as well as the sophistication of its army. To the formidable task of fighting and eventually defeating such a superior enemy, Mao added the even more onerous ambition of forging a totally new Chinese society. The formula that he drew up to achieve these two interconnected enormous tasks was elaborated in his writing *On Protracted War*. The kernel of this style of warfare is establishing revolutionary base areas in the countryside and advancing from there in a stage-by-stage manner until the whole country is liberated. Many followers of Mao agree with him that this style of carrying out a revolution is universally applicable in all backward societies. One of those followers, Lin Piao, concluded, "It must be emphasized that Comrade Mao Tse-tung's theory of the establishment of rural revolutionary base areas and the encirclement of the cities from the countryside is of outstanding and universal practical importance for the present revolutionary struggles of all oppressed nations and peoples, particularly for the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed nations and peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism and its lackeys."⁴ Thus, revolutionary war was expected to advance from

the remote areas to the center of the country in a gradual manner. The inevitable consequences of this are many.

Firstly, the progress of the war is supposed to be accompanied by a more radical change of society. Mao stressed that "A national revolutionary war as great as ours cannot be won without extensive and thoroughgoing political mobilization."⁵ He also emphasized that "cultural work" should go hand in hand with this effort of political mobilization. He concluded that: "Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is *an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution*"⁶ (emphasis added). In short, he instructed his party to accomplish the aim of forging a new culture for this ancient society while the war was being conducted. Thus, as the old China is rolled back along with the administration of the opposing enemy, the new China molded by the revolutionary party was expected to take its place. The period of the revolutionary war was taken as the opportune moment for "cleansing" both the society and the party of "filth." Individuals and social sectors that can come clean merely by changing their ways and beliefs are to be persuaded to do so. In the extreme case, physical elimination would be inevitable. In conclusion, the revolutionary party that is prosecuting the revolutionary war has to first and foremost see itself as a proto-society. Only then can it go on to cast the rest of the society in its own mold. It fashions a new culture and philosophy to reflect its status as a proto-society that it then transfers to the rest of the community. Again, the implication of adhering to this style of struggle for sharing the political space with others is self evident. Just as two societies would find it difficult to inhabit the same space, any other force that wishes to stay autonomous from the revolutionary party has to sooner or later decide to fall in line or else it runs the risk of eventual liquidation.

In addition, "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the *highest form of revolution*," as already cited. Hence, conceding any part of the

political domain to any other force that has not achieved a similar feat would constitute a regression. It would be abandoning to an untested force the fate of the masses. And as the success of the armed revolution attested to the creation of a correct relationship between the masses and the victorious revolutionary force, such an abandonment could be viewed as a betrayal.

The degree to which this principle was tried out in northern Ethiopia varies from front to front. The EPLF was cutoff from a large swathe of highland Eritrea during the period between 1978, when it withdrew to the Sahel, and 1990, when it finally succeeded in breaking out of its stronghold. During the thirteen years between 1978 and 1991, it was engaged in the "consolidation of a liberated area, including towns, which was defended and expanded by means of conventional battles."⁷ Thus, the degree to which it could remodel the sector of Eritrean society living outside the liberated area was considerably constrained by its relative isolation for more than a decade. On the other hand, the extent to which it managed to forge a totally new society in the Sahel was quite remarkable. This was practically demonstrated by the culture-shock that its members experienced when they were able to return to their home areas. Just a couple of examples will help to explain the gravity of this shock. In the hey-days of Marxism, and at a time when religion was downplayed as an important mark of identity, intermarriage between Moslem and Christian members of the EPLF was encouraged and did take place. The parents of both spouses were, however, very disturbed when this fact was revealed to them after liberation. In addition, many youngsters who grew up in the EPLF field did not have the "respectful" pronoun in their vocabulary. This resulted in a number of tense encounters between these children of the revolution and elderly persons when the two met after liberation. Finally, many EPLF members did not handle money for years and thus had lost the experience of bargaining when buying something. The youngsters who grew up in the field in particular rarely had occasions to need or use money, as all their provisions were provided by the front. Even shop-keepers were stunned with the willingness of these

EPLF fighters to pay whatever price the merchants declared. It is possible that with time the rest of Eritrean society and these fighters did manage to arrive at some sort of accommodation. In some ways, however, the gap separating the ethos of those who were molded by the struggle and the others continued to irk particularly EPLF leaders. For example, the youth of the highlands appeared much more slothful and lacking nationalist fervor. The decision to implement a national military service perhaps has to do more with closing this gap than the need for a bigger army, which is also considerable considering EPLF's ambition of becoming a regional power.

The experience of the TPLF was slightly different, as noted by some observers. "The TPLF on the other hand, controlled a larger, changing sphere of influence, surrounding government held towns, *and engaged in mobile guerrilla warfare rather than conventional battles*"⁸ (emphasis added). The TPLF, by comparison with the EPLF, hence remained essentially a guerrilla force until the last couple of years. As a result, it was in a relatively more continuous contact with a wider sector of Tigrean society. How much social engineering accompanied its Maoist style of armed struggle in the Tigrean society at large is not well known. That attempts were being made is, however, indisputable. We will recall just a few in order to demonstrate the efforts involved in translating Mao's teachings into practice.

All the three main anti-Dergue liberation fronts, i.e., OLF, EPLF, TPLF, used to have a peculiar practice of banning sexual relations between members as well as with non-members. This was found necessary partly because frequent mobility made the formation of structured relations in the form of a family unworkable. In addition, the government's policy of endangering the lives of relatives of "bandits" meant that one could not leave one's spouse or children behind in the villages that could likely fall to the regime. Tolerating casual relations under the circumstance could also leave the organization open to accusations of rape, a particular area where the guerrilla force wishes to contrast its behavior with that of the regime's troops. Hence, the best solution was

totally banning sexual relations until such time as the ability to defend a consolidated base area became possible. Hence, the EPLF and TPLF reached a stage when they un-banned sexual relations. What is of concern to us here is how the TPLF carried off this un-banning in a manner indicative of its agenda of cultural change. The TPLF declared "democratic marriage" of 1985 was supposed to differ from traditional practice in at least one manner; women were also encouraged to propose to the man of their choice. To what degree this actually took place is not known, although TPLF members used to boast of the occurrence of numerous incidents. Even if a minority did take place, it was indeed a brand new experience for the very traditional northern Ethiopian society. It is rumored that in later phases a more casual sexual relationship was encouraged or allowed, reminiscent of the "free love" that the communist of old used to espouse.

Any political, social, or cultural change in northern Ethiopia was bound to affect and be affected by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As is well known, this Church has always wielded, and undoubtedly continues to wield, immense influence over the Tigrean and all other northern Ethiopian societies. Inevitably, the society's relation with this Church and with the TPLF started undergoing a number of changes. The Church provided the bulk of the literate class as it ran all the parochial schools. And almost every village in Tigray and other parts of northern Ethiopia had its Church that, in addition to giving other necessary services, engaged in training a few semi-literate priests and deacons. The arrival of the TPLF in such villages started having unpredictable consequences. The front was eager to recruit as many willing youngsters as could be found. And the more literate such recruits, the better; leading to a large number of semi-literate young priests and deacons or those in training joining the TPLF. This depleted this essential sector of the village society. In the meantime, as the TPLF expanded the areas under its control, the accepted arrangement for consecrating new priests suffered a crisis. The power to consecrate new priests is vested in the Patriarch and his provincial representative, the Abuna. As areas under TPLF administration

increased, the number of churches cut off from these high church officials also grew, further depleting the number of available clergy to officiate at traditional functions such as marriages, christenings, and burials. At the same time, those Ethiopian Church officials who stayed on the government side were accused by the TPLF of compromising their moral authority by associating with a "criminal regime."

The combination of all these factors imposed upon TPLF leaders the need to do something about the institution of the Church in the areas under their administration. Despite the fact that the TPLF was an avowed Marxist-Leninist organization, it was engaged in conducting conferences of Tigrean clergy in the latter part of 1980s. One possible aim was to explore the selection of a new Patriarch or Abuna. What really resulted is not very well known, nor does it concern us here. What is of importance to the issue that we are dealing with is that an attempt was being made to create a new kind of relationship between the emerging authority and the institution of the Church. The observable result was the emergence of a new kind of priest in TPLF held areas. A "militant priest" (*taagay qes*) was supposedly fashioned in the process, as distinct from the priests that still continued to stay "in the service" of the regime. The root of the turmoil that is at present wracking the Ethiopian Orthodox Church can be traced back to this TPLF effort to shape new relations between Church and society as well as between Church and political authority. A more detailed study of the nature of this supposedly new relation and how it was brought about will be essential for understanding the nature of the present Tigrean society and its relation with the new administering authority.

We will discuss below the impact of the recurrent famine on Tigrean society and the behavior of the TPLF. That the famine helped to occasion the mobilization of society on an unprecedented scale will also be dealt with. What is of concern here is how the famine situation also helped to facilitate the TPLF's desire to implement its agenda of "social engineering." In the aftermath of the 1984-85 famine and massive international humanitarian in-

tervention that followed it, the TPLF was able to entertain what it dubbed as the “standardization of the peasantry.” Again, we do not know the content of this “standardization” initiative nor to what extent it was actually implemented. What is of concern is that it serves as an indication of TPLF’s plan to bring about “social transformation during the time of the struggle” consistent with Mao’s teaching.

To what extent it actually succeeded in transforming Tigrean society is open to question. But that it was one of the targets that the TPLF wanted to accomplish during the life of the struggle in Tigray is beyond doubt. Whatever the level of achievement in Tigray, it was attempted under conditions reminiscent of the Chinese experience. The period of social engineering coincided with the liberation struggle. What is surprising is the belief among TPLF leaders that a similar change of other societies could stay on their political agenda even after capturing central power. Almost three years after coming to power in Addis Ababa, the TPLF leader informed this writer that “social transformation” of other non-Tigrean societies was still being pursued. If the exercise in Tigray had any impact, the effort in other societies has less chance of making a meaningful positive outcome. To begin with, in these areas the pursuit of the social transformation agenda is not coinciding with the parallel social mobilization needed to bring down a detested regime. The local personnel that are supposed to implement the program to effect social change are not the selfless idealists who were defying a predator regime, but individuals who were attracted to the ruling group in order to further their self-interests. And these kinds of persons are not likely to win the trust of the society, a very important pre-requisite for convincing communities to try out new practices and customs. In this sense, the continued hope of the TPLF leaders to transform the societies that they conquered in 1991 does not differ much from a similar attempt by the regime that they unseated. Pursuing this policy from the palace, and in an alien social milieu at that, stands no chance of success. It is more likely that the process will open up new opportunities for corruption, as has happened again and again when

the attempt is made from the capital. The Dergue's similar attempt and the devastation that resulted from it is still fresh in the minds of the affected communities. What is of importance here is the fact that the continued pursuit of this aim necessarily precludes tolerating any other force that may interfere with its implementation.

Let us now turn our attention to another set of consequences resulting from the application of Mao's teaching on protracted revolutionary warfare. As explained above, the administration of the incumbent is systematically replaced by that of the insurgent, with the eventual capture of the capital and the declaration of a new government. Any front that adopts this plan must from the very outset consider itself, and behave as, also a proto-government. And this indeed was the case with the main liberation fronts that were fighting the Dergue government. They all adopted some kind of a national anthem, emblem and flag that serve as the paraphernalia of being a government. Each fighter was inducted into membership by taking an oath to uphold the Constitution and the Political Program of the Front. In a situation in which only one political line is correct, the front's Political Program becomes the only one that should be allowed to survive. Others have the chance of being persuaded to fall in line, failing which their elimination becomes justified. In addition, these fronts from the very outset establish departments that parallel government ministries, which they were expected to eventually become. In a society that had no experience of party politics, the consequence of the creation of these proto-governments becomes inescapable. The boundary separating party from the government is blurred to such an extent that separating one function from the other becomes impossible. Under such circumstances the partisan nature of administration becomes inevitable, with clear implications for the survival of other political groups and autonomous civic bodies.

In a similar manner, the initial guerrilla units are expected to serve as the basis of the country's new army. Hence, these kinds of liberation fronts all hasten to name their guerrilla force as the "Liberation Army" as soon as its size has attained a certain level.

This practice stands in contrast to the policy of other liberation fronts that are organized into the armed and political wings. The latter type of policy presumably is, for example, being pursued by the Sudanese rebels that are organized into the SPLA and SPLM. In this case, at least theoretically, a deliberate decision is made to draw a line between armed activities and political work. In the experience of the main anti-Dergue liberation fronts, however, such a division was considered erroneous. Thus political and military work are fused into one comprehensive liberation activity. This leads to a situation in which the politician is also a soldier and the soldier is equally well versed in political matters. The absence of military titles in these liberation fronts is a reflection of the fusion of political and military tasks, contrasting again the practice that prevails in the SPLA. Again, this is a lesson drawn from Mao's teachings. He wrote: "The Chinese Red Army is an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution ... besides fighting to destroy the enemy's military strength, it should shoulder such important tasks as doing propaganda among the masses, organizing the masses, arming them, helping them establish revolutionary political power and setting up Party organizations."⁹ Hence, the armed personnel is by and large a political worker. In addition, the political worker also should behave like a soldier, as Mao wrote: "The secretary of a Party committee must be good at being a 'squad leader.'"¹⁰ A militarist style of work ends up pervading all the activities of these kinds of political organizations.

In addition, as concluded by Mao, "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of issues by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution." Thus the TPLF, or other liberation fronts that are followers of Mao, could not stomach political defeat by losing an election after carrying out "the highest form of revolution." Not surprisingly, this is the conclusion that Meles arrived at after convincing himself that the military defeat of the OLF had been assured. He told American academics that the OLF lost the fighting that broke out in 1992 because it lacked the support of the Oromo people. Thus the issue has been successfully settled by war; the highest form of revolution. He appears

convinced that the Oromo people will prefer a Tigrean leadership over that of a less armed Oromo movement. That he could believe that this is possible in an ethnically charged political atmosphere bears testimony to the tendency of giving military victory precedence over a political one. This is another obvious way in which the tradition developed by the liberation fronts during the anti-Dergue fighting stood in the way of implementing the democratization exercise.

NOTES

1. D. Connell, *Against All Odds : A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1993), P. 78.
2. Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking : Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 61/62.
3. Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* Vol. II (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1965), p. 131.
4. Quoted by Chalmers Johnson in *Autopsy On People's War* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1973), p. 27.
5. Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* Vol. II (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1965), p. 153.
6. Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 299/300.
7. M. Duffield, and J. Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks: Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1994), p. 16.
8. Ibid. p. 26.
9. Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking : Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 100.
10. Ibid. p. 106.

Chapter 5

OTHER FACTORS: THE IMPACT OF THE CROSS BORDER OPERATION

Let us now turn our attention to the impact of the Cross Border Operation in entrenching some of the above attributes of the northern liberation fronts to an unprecedented scale. The Cross Border Operation is a unique experience in the practice of humanitarian intervention. Starting in the late 1970s, European church-based humanitarian organizations created a consortium to channel relief aid into the rebel-held areas of northern Ethiopia across the Sudan-Ethiopia border. The story of this truly unconventional humanitarian intervention is ably documented by Mark Duffield and John Prendergast in their 1994 book titled *Without Troops and Tanks: Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea*. The volume of aid channeled to the populations living in the rebel-held areas was quite considerable. According to Duffield and Prendergast, no less than \$700-million-worth of assistance was channeled across the Sudanese border into these areas. This was just the assistance that was not based directly on political considerations. The amount of politically motivated fund raised in Europe, USA, and the Arab countries is not known. The Egyptian writer, Mohamed Heikal, noted that the CIA orchestrated the creation of a revolving fund from Iranian and Arab sources that was channeled to the liberation fronts fighting against the Mengistu regime.¹ Together,

these inputs constitute a volume of assistance channeled to liberation fronts unprecedented in the history of the Horn of Africa.

It is not the massiveness of the assistance that these liberation fronts were able to mobilize that is of concern here. It is their ability to effectively use it in not only bolstering their military muscle, but, even more importantly, in cementing the political support of their societies. Even before such a large amount of relief aid was made available to them, these liberation fronts had drawn up a political practice "which linked the provision of public welfare with mass political mobilization."² Duffield and Prendergast believe that the relief wings of the liberation fronts were at one time able to raise from internal sources a major part of the necessary public assistance. Although this is quite a debatable matter, be that as it may. What is undeniable is the fact that by the second half of the 1980s, internationally raised assistance had come to substitute whatever supposedly used to be mobilized from internal sources.³ The volume of foreign relief aid at the disposal of the relief agencies of the liberation fronts shot up dramatically around the same time. This situation enabled the leaders of the concerned liberation fronts to reverse the usual contribution of war to the creation of famine and "successfully turned social dislocation and privation into a means of mass mobilization and political consolidation."⁴ This deliberate decision to tap foreign sources of relief coupled with the decision to turn dislocation and privation into a means of entrenching one's influence resulted in an inversion of the relation that usually exists between the guerrilla organization and the community in which it operates, as aptly concluded by Duffield and Prendergast: "It is clear that in choosing to assist civilians with various public welfare programs, they effectively reversed the Asian model of guerrilla warfare in which the rural producers were the source of material support for the political and military movement."⁵

The TPLF pursued the policy of moving hundreds of thousands of famine victims first to feeding centers in the Sudan and then relocating them later on in areas under its control. Other famine victims were allowed to remain in their villages supposedly because relief could be brought to them. The two types of disaster

victims became dependent on the TPLF and its relief wing for basic sustenance, thus standing the established guerrilla-community inter-dependence on its head. The implications of this drastic shift in society-front relation manifested themselves in the following years. The huge body of human resource that fell under its umbrella coupled with the availability of considerable amount of financial resource that followed the massive humanitarian intervention allowed the TPLF to entertain an ambition to increase its fighting ability. Taking more areas also became necessary in order to continuously raise the volume of relief assistance solicited from abroad. Thus was created a mutually reinforcing structure in which "public assistance cemented political support and growing political success facilitated increased humanitarian aid."⁶ It is this magic formula that encouraged TPLF leaders to set their sights on the Ethiopian capital much more realistically after the second half of the 1980s.

Its influence on the conduct of the war aside, the new relation that resulted from the availability of massive relief aid enabled TPLF leaders to attempt such bold social engineering experiments, as the "standardization of the peasantry." The "know-all" image of these leaders rose to new heights. Many of us were surprised with the insignificant effect that the mood of society had on TPLF activists when they started operating in such southern societies as the Oromos. TPLF activists were able to ignore the unmistakable rejection by the community in a number of localities. What could have disheartened other former guerrilla activists appeared to have no effect on them. Many concluded that this was possible because these TPLF activists were realistic in seeing their position as that of conquerors instead of liberators. This may be the case, but it is also possible that they had already grown immune to the views of the Tigrean society that was doing as it was told because of its dependent status. Such an attitude of remaining unaffected by social acceptance, or the lack of it, could not come about overnight. If this speculation is true, it is one very sad outcome of a very laudable work; the unconventional delivery of relief through the Cross Border Operation.

In contrast, the EPLF did not pursue the policy of moving a large number of villagers across the international boundary. It succeeded in providing support mostly to the people already living in its consolidated base area, which in some cases included even towns, as aptly reported by Duffield and Prendergast. Thus the famine and the massive humanitarian generosity that accompanied it did not significantly increase the human resource base from which it could recruit new members. This led to TPLF accusation that the EPLF was resorting to the capturing of new recruits from the Dergue-held highland areas occasionally penetrated by its mobile guerrilla units. According to the TPLF, these kinds of recruits were undergoing training under strict guard in the latter half of the 1980s. The TPLF for itself evidently did not have to go to such physical compulsion to increase the size of its army many fold starting in 1984/85. There was a considerable hostage community from which it could easily raise new recruits. Similarly, after failing to attract any independent persons to join its so called People's Democratic Organizations (PDOs), it resorted to recycling captured Dergue troops. Again a case of recruitment from a hostage group, a trend which was evidently entrenched by the late 1980s.

This situation created an unprecedented opportunity for the TPLF to practice its own kind of democracy. For example, when disagreement developed within its leadership, the group that supposedly lost out was theoretically allowed to go out and campaign for its position among the society and even the members. But as related to this author by the TPLF leader, they could not get any member of society "to even give them food." Even troops were given the right to decide whether they want to continue the fighting or to return to their villages. Again according to TPLF leader, there was a certain amount of grumbling among TPLF fighters after the Dergue withdrew from Tigray, but the fighting continued in the home area of the Amharas. A significant proportion of the Tigrean fighters evidently found it unnecessary to continue with the war after Tigray was liberated. Some of the ones that expressed such an opinion were told that they had the choice of going home if they felt that way. According to the same source,

some 35,000 laid down their arms and headed for home at a time when the fighting had entered a critical stage. It is inconceivable that the sudden departure of such a large group of fighters could be allowed if the certainty of their eventual return was not assured. It is not inconceivable that significant pressure was brought to bear on their parents and relatives to persuade these fighters to return to the front. One wonders if the provision of relief assistance did not figure in bringing about this change of heart. The chastened mood of these returnees must have definitely left a strong impression not only on themselves but also on their fellow combatants of the considerable power exercised by the leaders.

Duffield and Prendergast underline the linkage between politics and relief work when they state that “public assistance cemented political support and growing political success facilitated increased humanitarian aid.” The linkage between the provision of supplies and politics took on a new nature in the post-liberation period in non-Tigrean societies as well, as attested to by many writers. Turning out to vote and voting correctly was induced by the threat of withholding such essential government services as the “sales of sugar, edible oils, soaps, and salt at the kebele shops—an especially effective inducement in the countryside” as stated by Theodore Vestal.⁷ The Norwegian Observers of the 1995 General elections also testified that such services were manipulated in order to influence elections. Duffield and Prendergast themselves identified the structure resulting from the linkage of public service to mobilizing political support as an important obstacle to “manage a transition to peace and reconstruction.”⁸ It is not inconceivable that the same manipulation of social services could have resulted even if the TPLF did not have a prior experience, but that it did help to entrench the practice. In this kind of set-up, whoever controls the administration that includes in its purview the management of sales of essential items can easily tilt the playing field against his opponents. This was rehearsed and found effective even before the Dergue’s overthrow as a result of the Cross Border Operation. And it was, and continues to be,

employed in denying other autonomous political groups any foothold, especially outside the capital.

The other repercussions of the practice that developed as a result of the Cross Border Operation are less tangible, although they are potentially just as consequential. The fronts assembled detailed information on the composition and ownership of the families living under their administration as part of the strategy of channeling relief aid. "Apart from location, this included names of all family members in the village; ages; clan names; children; marital status; numbers of dependants; total number of family heads in a household; and so on, together with an appraisal of existing and past assets, such as, family income; site and size of farm; livestock owned; livestock lost and relief provisions distributed to the household."⁹ Admittedly, most of these data are necessary to assess need and to channel relief. The inclusion of such others as clan names is, however, intriguing. That aside, an administration that has this kind of detailed information on citizens definitely can put it to use in bolstering political power and control. For the TPLF this kind of pervasive knowledge about society serves as the high watermark of effective administration. Thus it is not inconceivable that the duplication of a similar structure in the other non-Tigrean societies will be attempted. Duplicating a similar level of influence and control also may follow from this set target. However, in the other areas the assembled data will be used to enhance the exaction of resources, cooperation in subduing opponents, and other services as opposed to the provision of assistance.

Some of the expatriates that were involved in the Cross Border Operation themselves were, either wittingly or unwittingly, affecting the image of the leaders of the TPLF and EPLF. Some of these used to evince awe and admiration for these leaders. The influence that this has on the rank and file is unmistakable. If even the "*faranjis*" (foreigners) are humbled by the behavior of the "comrades," this definitely signaled the unquestionable sagacity and excellence of the leaders. The resulting heightened status of these leaders in the eyes of the rank-and-file must have accrued to their already considerable power. In addition, these expatriates served

as a network of advocacy groups for the fronts in their own societies. In order to carry out this work, they not only frequently used the David-versus-Goliath metaphor, but also held up an ideal image of leaders. And such an advocacy network covered not only Europe and North America but even extended to Australia and New Zealand. No Ethiopian government, let alone movement, ever succeeded in harnessing such a widespread network of support. This was admittedly laudable at the time when these fronts were fighting the most atrocious regime ever witnessed in the experience of the country. But its continuation after these forces became governing bodies, and credible allegations of their undemocratic handling of other societies were aired, is truly disturbing. Understandably, some of the concerned expatriates are finding it difficult to revise the positive images that they had painted earlier and under different circumstances. And the more they stay on the pro-government bandwagon, the more difficult it will be for them to bring about a change in the theme of their advocacy work. This threatens to make their original motive questionable. If they were driven by concern about human suffering, why should they find torture, extra-judicial killings, and disappearances of members of non-Tigrean societies tolerable? Could the violation of human rights by one's friends be acceptable?

Praising these former liberation fronts, now single-party governments, continues to be the message of some of the expatriates who were involved in the Cross Border Operation. At the same time most of them have only the most disparaging things to say about opposition groups. In doing this they, either deliberately or otherwise, justify the systematic narrowing of political space that is increasingly failing to harbor these autonomous forces. Unknown to themselves, these types of expatriates are falling into the same trap in which Haile Selassie's friends found themselves towards the end of his rule. These also started their involvement in an era when their advocacy was positive and was welcome. Invasion by Fascist Italy in the second half of the 1930s was, in most cases, the beginning of their involvement. Again it was another case of the David-and-Goliath image being appropriately employed. But even

after the emperor's autocratic rule was discredited at home, they remained as advocates of his style of rule. One can point out Haile Selassie's American friend, John Spencer, among a large group of Europeans and Americans who literally worshipped him and held up his image in the most positive way possible. This was partly responsible for the period of honeymoon in his relationship with the Western governments lasting until the end of his days. Some criticism from his friends could have perhaps encouraged a serious effort of reform, thus pre-empting the creation of circumstances that not only claimed his life but also plunged the country into a seventeen-year-long devastation.

Power structures born of the application of the teachings of Lenin and Mao, of themselves, enable those who create and run them the possibility of crafting two different dramas, one internal and the other external. In this practice one reality is for external consumption which often does not reflect the internal situation. The ability to conduct affairs in secrecy and the existence of a central orchestrating organ are essential for ascertaining that just the right things are done. An effective application of Lenin's and Mao's teachings can produce such a system. Another way in which the Cross Border Operation strengthened the effort of creating such a system in northern Ethiopia was by serving as a unique opportunity to rehearse and fine tune the staging of such a drama to the highest pitch. Due to its unconventional nature, relief delivery through the Cross Border Operation was predicated on a more stringent monitoring of actual delivery in comparison to that required from the NGOs operating on the government side. Hence, many monitoring missions were dispatched to witness the channeling of relief aid to the needy as well as to assess the degree of need. In most cases, the liberation fronts set up the itinerary of the monitors and carefully guided them to the chosen sites and events. It is not inconceivable that the encounter of these monitors was not carefully orchestrated to produce the desired impression. In a number of cases, a very strict chaperoning of the monitors was not actually necessary, as some of the concerned persons were already sold on the ideals of the hosts. Yet, these liberation fronts have the

habit of not leaving anything to chance. Hence, that some of the gatherings of the “masses” attended by these persons were laced with pre-designated speakers cannot be rejected outright. Such pre-designated speakers were often briefed ahead of time on what to say and what kinds of questions to expect and how to respond to them. As the interpreters were also provided by the fronts, a fallback mechanism for making the response consistent with what is desired was thus provided. Even the institution that ran the Cross Border Operation, the Emergency Relief Desk (ERD), engaged in some sort of posturing of its own as attested to by Duffield and Prendergast. In order to fend off the possible accusation of partisanship in the conflict, the liberation fronts’ relief departments, ERA and REST, “were themselves portrayed as ‘neutral’ by the ERD.”¹⁰ This prior introduction to monitoring by foreign evaluators is partly responsible for “election observation” in Tigray in 1992, 1994, and 1995 being a much more orderly affair in comparison to the situation witnessed in the areas conquered towards the end of the war. However, even in Tigray, concealing the real drama from an astute observer was not always completely possible. For example, many supposedly independent candidates that stood for the 1995 elections were actually TPLF members who were assigned the task in order to make the elections appear “more democratic.” Surprisingly, a couple of such decoy candidates themselves complained to election observers.¹¹ As we had to repeat it at a number of junctures, one should realize that achieving a level of practice and structures entrenched in Tigray in other areas is being pursued by the TPLF. The TPLF government expects that with time a similar pervasive penetration of society will be accomplished elsewhere as well. Then it will become even more eager to invite election observers to come and witness and approve the drama that is staged for them. We are concerned here with the fact that the policy of staging one drama for external consumption had been tried out successfully during the monitoring of relief work.

Even the TPLF government’s ongoing effort to squeeze out some indigenous NGOs can be partly traced back to the experiences of the Cross Border Operation period. Both the TPLF

and EPLF were able to portray the acquisition of relief aid through this mechanism as a proof that there is a growing international sympathy for their cause. At least the arrival of externally raised relief assistance served as “an important psychological boost for the stressed civilian population.”¹² At the same time, the staff members of the participating foreign NGOs became the source of information on the situation prevailing in the countryside that they visited in the course of their monitoring missions. The TPLF knows from its own experience that another NGO having a history of association with a political group may repeat the same process, at least in parts. The case of the former relief wing of the OLF, the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), fits into such a picture. After a state of outright hostility between the OLF and the TPLF government developed in the summer of 1992, the Oromo Relief Association drew up a plan to gradually de-link from the OLF and thus survive as an autonomous indigenous NGO. The TPLF, however, based on its own experience, could consider ORA as nothing other than the OLF’s fifth column. The illegal seizure of ORA assets and closure of its projects without due process of law emanate from this conviction. Surprisingly, not many former participants of the Cross Border Operation openly came to the defense of ORA, which was a beneficiary of their unconventional and laudable humanitarian intervention during the war years, albeit a minor one. It is even more surprising that the government was not asked to abide by the regional intergovernmental protocol on humanitarian work in war situations that it championed in the very first year of its rule. As is to be remembered, the first summit of the leaders of the Horn of African countries, hosted by the new TPLF government in 1991, adopted a protocol stipulating that neither battle lines nor the respect of international boundaries should hamper the delivery of relief. Yet, neither the participating governments nor the international powers and agencies that lauded the adoption of this protocol have found it necessary to remind the TPLF government of its obligation under an instrument for the championing of which it then won international acclaim. On the contrary, the ongoing effort to stifle the work and possibly the survival of ORA as an

autonomous indigenous NGO is rationalized on one basis or another. Even the fact that ORA has successfully contested the illegal seizure of its property and the closure of its offices in the government's not-so-impartial courts has failed to produce a change in this resounding silence. This kind of situation tends to reinforce the overwhelming feeling among Oromos that the whole world is ranged against them. In some ways this approximates the feeling that prevailed in Tigrean and Eritrean societies for a major part of the war years. How the positioning of other peoples in their former situation is impacting on the minds of the present Tigrean leaders is not easy to find out. One thing is, however, clear. Silence by the powers and the former participants of the Cross Border Operation is sending a clear signal to the TPLF government that it can act with impunity in matters concerning Oromos.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEAD ON THE LIVING

As a final point in our effort to understand the factors that have influenced and continue to influence the mood of the leaders of the liberation fronts, we will briefly touch upon the impact of immediate history. History plays a very important role in the politics of Ethiopia. Every political group normally prefaces its manifesto with a lengthy recital of history. The interpretation of history according to one's perspective is made in order to root the correctness of one's political agenda in historical analysis. Not surprisingly, competing interpretations of history face each other across the political divides in Ethiopia. This is a complex issue and does not directly concern what we are trying to achieve in this brief writing. What is unavoidable is the need to grasp the impact of the immediate past on the present and the future.

Armed struggle is naturally a much more emotionally charged matter than its civilian counterpart, which in itself is quite an emotional affair. Those who have gone through the process of armed struggle remember numerous precarious occasions, moments when the difference between life and death both for the individual and the group was divided by a very thin margin, times when the chal-

lenges appeared insurmountable and the odds were hopelessly stacked against one's situation. Any time a new challenge or risk appears on the horizon, these previous dire moments are recalled in order to gird oneself and one's followers to face the new situation and prevail. For example, that is exactly what the TPLF did when it was preparing to militarily liquidate the OLF. Victory over other previous opponents, such as the EDU and the EPRP, at a time when the TPLF was very small and not well armed, was recalled. The recital of the history of numerous touch-and-go battles against Black Africa's biggest military force which ended in victory was of course a daily exercise. The mission of eliminating the even less organized and armed OLF was thus made to be comparatively less challenging. The OLF for its part could also point to other similar testing times to encourage its combatants to take on the more armed and organized TPLF troops. The former's situation, however, suffers from some kind of warp both in time and space. It could appropriately drum up determination and the willingness to pay heavy sacrifices when its mission was just and had at least the tacit support of its society. That phase effectively came to an end when the liberation of Tigray was achieved. The situation prevailing now is in many respects very different, to say the least. The remainder of TPLF's former selfless liberation combatants have now been turned into salaried soldiers. Like all government soldiers, these troops can take territory and dismantle the visible signs of the other's presence. But they are totally ill equipped to deal with the intangible strengths of the armed opposition, such as the society's feelings of association with its recognized leaders, kinship sympathies, etc.

But the more troops are killed in this endeavor returning to the *status quo ante* becomes that much more difficult. These liberation fronts have developed a practice of honoring their martyrs. And changing from the course on which these martyrs fell can be interpreted as a betrayal by the leaders. As any dissident group or individual could capitalize on such a perception to foment revolt, leaders are very hesitant to consider making changes, even if to do so appears wise. There is no more emotive slogan than continu-

ing the mission on which “comrades so-and-so lost their lives.” This is one side of the coin in which the memory of the dead continues to influence the present and future decisions of leaders.

There is also another aspect that is becoming even more important. Even during a just war, mistakes are inevitably committed. Civilian lives are frequently lost under questionable circumstances. In a situation of fighting between a government force and a nationalist opposition, the frequency of such events not only rises but even becomes part of the overall endeavor. Villagers are arrested, tortured, and killed much more frequently. A similar array of draconian measures is employed to cow urban sympathizers of the armed opposition. Those implicated in the commission of such acts live in fear of someday being held accountable. Especially now, after the members of the previous regime have been put on trial for human rights violations, this possibility hangs over the head of any person or group that has carried out any inhuman activity. This is one negative repercussion of an incumbent trying those whom he overthrew while himself engaging in similar wrongdoings. Just as the memory of one’s combatants who fell in the prosecution of the fighting renders a peaceful ending problematic, the fear of accounting for the manner in which members of the opposing force were eliminated also poses an obstacle. Those implicated in the latter kind of activity can see only one way out: a continuation of the fighting until the total and permanent suppression of all real and potential opposition groups is guaranteed. And no government has yet succeeded in militarily doing this forever.

This problem stands in the way of rapprochement, even if there is a willingness to do so. The same applies to the opponent. How this growing vicious cycle of settling of accounts can be handled in a peaceful way needs to be addressed for all those interested in a peaceful resolution of conflicts. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission currently being pioneered by the South Africans may become a precedent. The most important lesson is that pushing an opposition into armed rebellion is much easier than averting or bringing it to an end once it has started.

NOTES

1. Heikal, Mohammed. *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the Gulf War* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992) p.45.
2. M. Duffield, and J. Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks : Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1994), p. 9.
3. Ibid. p. 2.
4. Ibid. p. 17.
5. Ibid. p. 29.
6. Ibid. p. 18.
7. "An Analysis of the New Constitution of Ethiopia and the Process of its Adoption" by Theodore Vestal, a paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of African Studies Association in Toronto, Ontario, 4 Nov. 1994. p.5/6.
8. M. Duffield, and J. Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks : Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1994), P. 18.
9. Ibid. p. 27.
10. Ibid. p. 11.
11. Terrence Lyons, "Closing the Transition: The May 1995 Elections in Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 34,1 (1996): 133.
12. M. Duffield, and J. Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks : Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1994), p. 28.

HAS THE TPLF CHANGED?

We started this section by stressing the similarity between the two victorious northern Ethiopian liberation fronts, the TPLF and EPLF. Their behavior as ruling parties, however, differed in one particular aspect. While the rhetoric of the TPLF took on a tone that suggested an espousal of participatory politics, the EPLF, from the very beginning, honestly and forthrightly rejected the Western style of democracy. At his first meeting with Western diplomats in Addis Ababa during the July 1991 Conference, the EPLF leader, Isaias Afwerki, stunned those assembled with his frank dismissal of the relevance of democratic pluralism to his society. Reminiscent of the stand of most post-colonial African leaders, he put more emphasis on economic reconstruction than on “wasteful” political bickering that would be inevitable under pluralist democracy. By rejecting the right of political organization along ethnic lines that was being pioneered by the TPLF, he echoed the “nation-building” agenda of most African countries. Commenting on the merits or demerits of this choice of Eritrean leaders falls outside the scope of this writing. It is important to underline, however, that the pronouncements of the Eritrean government has ever since remained consistent with its actual practice of politics and governance.

The TPLF, on the other hand, started out by signaling that it was ready to pioneer participatory politics in Ethiopia. One unambiguous way in which it did this was by inviting other political

groups, including those who did not play any role in the unseating of the previous regime, to join it in shaping the country's political life on a totally new basis. Why these two fronts that followed identical courses to power opted to project two diametrically opposite self-images is hard to say. It is possible that the TPLF felt a need for alliances in containing any possible resistance by the overthrown elite. At first sight the possibility of such a resistance appeared quite threatening. It was difficult to fathom with any degree of certainty the mood of the more than half a million troops of the previous regime that were indoctrinated along the politics of the overthrown elite. If any significant portion of this large army made a common cause with a section of the more sophisticated overthrown elite, the resulting challenge to any new government would have been quite formidable. Thus the need to appear accommodating towards the interests of primarily southern societies, particularly the country's largest ethnic group, the Oromos. Whether this calculation had anything to do with the TPLF's signal of charting a course of participatory politics cannot go beyond mere speculation. If it did, the inability by the overthrown elite to adopt a coherent strategy to pursue its ambition of regaining power soon dissipated any fear coming from that quarter. Along with this the need for having alliances with other groups also diminished.

Much more importantly, there appeared to be a significant amount of pressure by foreign powers on the TPLF to adopt an agenda of democratization. US Government officials in particular went on record linking their government's support to progress on a democratic path. The then Assistant Undersecretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, publicly announced "no democracy, no cooperation." It is mainly as a result of this kind of open pressure that the TPLF started entertaining democratization. Other skeptical groups, the OLF in particular, also chose to give the experiment the benefit of the doubt based on the hope of US and other donor governments' influence in keeping the democratization promise on track. Without this influence being wielded, it was obvious to many participants, the democratization

exercise stood no chance of ever succeeding. Only in the face of such pressure would the TPLF have been moved to change from the kind of politics that it had pursued throughout all the years of its existence as a rebel group. But did it really need to change?

The answer to this question can be found only by assessing the extent to which the US Government and its allies were willing to go in encouraging the participants to stay on the course of democratization. The hope of those who were eager to see the dawning of a new democratic era in Ethiopia rose to new heights when actions taken by US Government officials started going beyond making public pronouncements. Brokering an agreement between the two main participants in the democratization exercise, the TPLF and OLF, was one of these concrete actions. The other important concrete measure was the decision to send observers to witness the June 1992 regional and district elections. The OLF hoped that US mediation would have repercussions on any party that would renege on the bilateral agreement. And all participants in the elections expected some form of international reaction if the observers found the election not sufficiently fair and free. In the event, the TPLF reneged on the US-mediated agreement with the OLF without any public disapproval by the mediator. And the verdict by the International Group of Observers that the handling of the regional and district elections was far from fair and free failed to produce the expected reaction by the US and other powers. The lessons drawn by the TPLF are self-evident: it need not worry about external reactions.

This impression was further re-inforced by measures that were taken at the international level in the aftermath of the failed regional and district elections of June 1992. Despite the fact that the verdict of the observers clearly indicated a deviation from the democratization process, the main means of influencing a rectification were not resorted to. The TPLF government was then very eager to get a significant amount of economic aid to start reviving the country's devastated economy. For the donor governments this offered perhaps the most important leverage to encourage com-

promise and accommodation between the parties participating in the democratization undertaking. Unfortunately, the directly opposite measure was taken when the largest amount of economic assistance ever provided to an Ethiopian government was approved by the Consultative Group while the results of the June elections were still being contested. This went beyond tolerating TPLF reneging on its democratization promise and bilateral agreements and served as a clear signal of outright approval. One more nail was driven in the coffin of the democratization pact.

Many subsequent events suggested to the TPLF that it can stay on the course of continuously narrowing the country's political space. The US Government evidently found the above gestures insufficient to reassure the TPLF that it can continue talking of democracy while practicing dictatorship. Some amount of pain was taken to give the TPLF a new rationale for staying on the course that it too found comfortable. In particular, the prestige of an eminent American political scientist was tapped to provide the TPLF with such a rationale through the words of a renowned scholar. The USAID funded a brief visit to Ethiopia by Professor of Political Science at Harvard, Samuel Huntington, in the summer of 1993 when the process of drafting a new Constitution was underway. Despite the fact that the scholar admits having no prior knowledge about Ethiopia, he visited the country and met with the then president as well as with those engaged in drafting the Constitution. The title of the report that he produced at the end of this visit was "*Political Development in Ethiopia: A Peasant-based Dominant-Party Democracy?*" For a group that was willing to grab anything that would justify its already established political practice and tradition, just this title would have sufficed. But the professor went even further in giving tips to the TPLF. We quote below the key sections at length to demonstrate the kind of advice that was being given to TPLF leaders.

America's foremost expert on the phenomenon of democratization made many sweeping conclusions about the country's political future despite the fact that his exposure to it was no more than a week-long visit.

Conclusion Number One

“The starting point for any consideration of these issues is the fact that overall conditions in Ethiopia are not favorable to the development of constitutional democracy.”¹ Because transition to democracy has taken place only in countries with per capita GNP in excess of \$2,000, Ethiopia, with a per capita GNP of less than \$150, “clearly lacks the economic base that facilitates movement to democracy.”² Huntington at the same time listed a number of factors that could make the attempt to democratize Ethiopia a promising one: (A) Ethiopian society is predominantly Christian (albeit Orthodox); this becomes relevant because with “few exceptions (India, Israel, Japan, Sri Lanka and Turkey) long-established democracies have only existed in Christian countries.”³ Had the professor had his facts straight and known that on the contrary the inhabitants of Ethiopia are predominantly Moslem, he would have removed this item from the list of factors that make Ethiopia’s hope for democratization promising. (B) “The existence of a traditional aristocracy at least among the Amharas also could help a democratic development.”⁴ In practice not a single individual from this aristocracy appears to be supportive of the development of democratic practices and institutions. None of them did so while the Emperor was still ruling, when they had much more clout than they do now. (C) “Finally, the external environment is now highly conducive to democratization.”⁵ Those who hoped that democratization would be given a serious consideration of course put their money mostly on this factor. After taking stock of the factors that affect the chance of democratizing Ethiopia both positively and negatively in this manner, the professor emphatically concluded: “The overall balance of economic, social, and other conditions in Ethiopia, however, is not presently favorable to democratization.”⁶

Conclusion Number Two

The achievement of democracy must be balanced against other goals. “The extent to which creation of democracy is a goal of TGE political leaders depends on the depth of their own personal commitment to democracy and the degree to which achievement

of democracy is compatible with the achievement of other goals. Presumably these other goals include:

- (1) maintaining themselves and the EPRDF in power;
- (2) maintaining the national unity of Ethiopia (minus Eritrea), preventing secessionist movements, and promoting national integration;
- (3) promoting economic development;
- (4) enhancing political order and preventing ethnic and other violence.⁷

Pity Mengistu who did not get a similar support from a renowned American scholar when he was pursuing these same objectives plus retaining Eritrea. Which party is it that will be averse to practicing democracy, given that particularly the first objective of permanently staying in power is not threatened? Reconciling democracy with the objective of permanently staying in power is definitely something worth trying, music to the ears of the TPLF and the groups that it created in order to rule other peoples!

Conclusion Number Three

A formula that enables one to reconcile the ambition of permanently staying in power and the other objectives listed above with “democratization” needs to be discovered. “Whether or not the introduction of democracy conflicts with the achievement of these other goals depends in large part on the nature of the democratic system that is created.”⁸ The professor then suggested that “All-in-all, however, the makings of a dominant-party system appear to exist in Ethiopia and such a system could have many advantages for the country.”⁹ Thus a dominant-party democracy is identified as a system that would do the trick. And as such a system depends on identifying the dominant group in society and becoming its party, the professor did a fast analysis of Ethiopian society and came up with the peasantry as being such a dominant group. “A political system has to be supported by the dominant groups in society. These may be urban or rural groups; they may be social classes, including the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, middle class, work-

ing class, peasantry; they may be particular ethnic groups.”¹⁰ Those of us who have never inhabited the pinnacle of one of this world’s highest ivory towers have known societies dominated by the others listed above but not the peasantry. But as the children of peasants, we do not need to attend Harvard in order to realize that the Ethiopian peasantry does not—and cannot conceivably—dominate Ethiopian society. We do realize that the peasant predominates in Ethiopian society but a dominant Ethiopian peasantry is an invention of Harvard. We cannot, however, question Harvard professors’ track record of inventing many things, including napalm.

The only thing that remained was identifying the party that would become the dominant one. By assigning the entire Ethiopian peasantry as the exclusive constituency of the TPLF and its EPRDF, the professor re-christened it as the Dominant-Party for the Ethiopian Peasantry. The rest is easy. Thus “it seems highly likely that in a free and honest election in Ethiopia President Meles and the EPRDF would also be returned to power by the overwhelming support of rural voters.”¹¹ This despite the fact that a rough poll run by the US agency, NDI, had already demonstrated the absence of such overwhelming support by the rural population. The fate of democracy as the rest of us know it has thus been sealed by the verdict of a renowned American expert on the subject of democratization.

An academician has the right to express his views on any field of his expertise or otherwise. His only problem would be facing the criticism of his fellow scholars. But when his trip is funded by a branch of the US Government, we cannot take his comments as any thing but US Government recommendation to the TPLF dressed in scholarly garb. And the US Government has the right to support and endorse any regime that it finds appealing. What is unethical and totally immoral is the pretension that democratic options still exist in Ethiopia, based upon which opposition groups are invited to participate in meaningless elections. What both the US Government and the Ethiopian regime need to do to overcome the moral dilemma emanating from Huntington’s prescrip-

tion is to come clean and officially state that democracy, as the rest of the world practices it, is neither possible nor necessary in Ethiopia. Then the situation will be identical to the one prevailing in neighboring Eritrea. And the Ethiopian peoples will be saved the insult of being forced to engage in the periodic charade of voting in elections whose outcomes are predetermined.

At the beginning of this section we recalled Lenin's teaching about forming a party for the oppressed, and how this ploy fell on a fertile ground and how it shaped the structures and political practice of the northern liberation fronts. We then tried to identify pressure from the donor community as the only meaningful incentive for the TPLF to start the arduous task of shifting from this tradition. The US Government, through the agency of Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington, repeated Lenin's advice of old. The message delivered to the TPLF is that it does not indeed need to change.

Presumably, this was justified on the grounds of holding the country together. Few, of course, remember that Mobutu and his likes started their political careers by carrying out the same foreign advice. This has resulted in one case after another, in African states transitioning from a condition of extreme centralization to one of anarchy. It is the missing middle ground, where ambitions and interests, whether by individuals, social sectors, or classes, trying to survive side by side, that lies at the root of this increasingly recurrent African tragedy. In Ethiopia, in particular, extreme centralization in its traditional and ideological variants have just been proven futile. Perhaps with economic, political, and military support of the US and the prestige of its academicians, the TPLF will succeed where others failed. Those of us who doubt this believe all concerned should take a hard look at the unfolding reality of growing discontent in TPLF-ruled Ethiopia and try to avert another calamity.

NOTES

1. Samuel Huntington, *Political Development in Ethiopia: A Peasant-based Dominant Party Democracy?*: Report to USAID/Ethiopia on Consultations with the Constitutional Commission 28 March-1 April 1993. (17 May, 1993) p. 1.
2. Ibid. p. 2.
3. Ibid. p. 3.
4. Ibid. p. 3.
5. Ibid. p. 3.
6. Ibid. p. 3.
7. Ibid. p. 3.
8. Ibid. p. 3.
9. Ibid. p. 10.
10. Ibid. p. 7.
11. Ibid. p. 10.

Part III

PUTTING THE TRANSITION IN AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the developments of the transitional period within the context of a continuous process to shape a new and more inclusive and cohesive state out of the Ethiopian empire will reveal that she still stands at a crossroads. The imperial nature of the present Ethiopian entity, rooted in the brutal conquest of one sector by another, is now much more widely recognized than it was a few decades ago.¹ The central feature of Ethiopia's imperial legacy is the domination of many of her peoples by elite coming from a particular national (ethnic) group. Scrapping the state structures and political ideology that were propping up the domination of one group over the rest of the peoples was one of the fundamental objectives of the democratization pact. Perhaps the most disappointing consequence of the derailment of the democratization process thus is the failure to once and for all put an end to domination. Instead, what was achieved during the transition was merely a shift "from Amharic towards Tigrean domination,"² as concluded by the Norwegian Observers of the May 1995 elections. A similar conclusion is drawn by several academicians coming from the country. The Oromo academician, Asafa Jalata, after elaborating how "[i]n Ethiopian ethnic-class hierarchy, the Tigrayans have been second to the Amharas," concludes that the events of the transition demonstrated merely that "The new Tigrayan rulers are mainly interested in succeeding to Amhara power."³ The self-declared Gojjame Amhara scholar, Teshale Tibebu, reaches the same conclusion when he writes, "What we are now witnessing under the rule of the EPRDF is the passage of senior partnership from the Amhara to the Tigrayans."⁴ Thus, instead of dismantling a hierarchical positioning of national (ethnic) groups within the state system, the developments of the transitional period succeeded only in effecting a switching of positions

at the very top. This mere shifting of positions is being accompanied by the formulation and "legitimation" of a new state structure in place of the previous one. However, the new state-management strategy, adopted by the present rulers, is proving just as inherently contradictory as the one it is replacing. In fact, the contradictions embedded in the present rulers' state-management strategy are so glaring that their untenability is likely to grow with the passage of time. Either the additional steps needed to permanently end these contradictions are taken or else the alienation of many communities from the state and its functionaries will continue to persist. It is such an alienation that in the past played a considerable role in making the breakaway of Eritrea inevitable. The continued alienation of other communities from the Ethiopian state and its leading political figures will definitely continue to fuel a desire to opt out of it by more and more peoples.

Ethiopia can least afford to waste time and energy on averting such an inevitable consequence of alienation. As it is, the challenges facing the present generation of leaders coming from all her component communities are already truly monumental. Reversing a situation in which a galloping population growth is outstripping the production of food and other basic necessities for survival alone is enormously burdensome. Continuous pressure on the environment poses an ever-growing danger not only to the inhabitants of the Ethiopian highlands but also to the communities living down the rivers that flow both west and east. No one particular group (especially one coming from a minority nationality), regardless of how committed, capable and well-intentioned, is likely to single-handedly bring about miraculous improvements on the various fronts that are crying out for urgent attention at the same time. Its success appears even less likely so long as its major preoccupation continues to be the containment of dissidence born of a legitimate feeling of alienation. Eliminating the root causes of alienation and disaffection should be the starting point for tackling the burdensome tasks enumerated above. This is the foundation of a state's political health and of its hopes for economic prosperity, not the reverse, as is often assumed. And it can be achieved only

if a new set-up—that promotes a genuine feeling by more and more peoples to commonly own the state, its institutions and leaders—is put in place. Then and only then will the political tendency to opt out of the state give way to an in-country competition for leadership. Then and only then will defending the commonly owned state and its institutions become the joint mission of most of the stakeholders. Only under such a circumstance will the realization of a “political entity embedding the common attributes of territory, population and government, imbued with a notion of nationalism and holding a quality of sovereignty”⁵ prove credible. Only then can the ongoing scramble to be less impoverished than the others be replaced with the positive attitude of fostering a situation of co-prosperity, i.e., promoting the concept and feeling of a commonwealth.

Successive rulers of the present Ethiopian entity have been forced to continuously shift the projection of their realm. A convergence of global, regional and internal considerations repeatedly forced them to change the articulation of the nature of the state. And every time they gave a new image to their realm they had to accompany it with an apparent change in their state-management strategy. The controversial state structure resulting from the state-management strategy of the present rulers is simply the most recent in this series of shifting imaging of Ethiopia and styles of its administration. In this section, I will try to briefly trace the various stages through which Ethiopia’s imaging and the accompanying styles of administration have passed during the reign of the previous rulers. Then I will attempt to put the changes brought about during the post-Dergue era within this trajectory of change. An attempt will also be made to catalogue the issues that were addressed during this latest change. This, hopefully, will enable us to identify the further steps that appear necessary to end the contradictions that are embedded in these shifting imaging and styles of administering Ethiopia.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE AN ETHIOPIAN

It appears that defining the terms “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians” is the proper place to start the work of cataloguing the shifting images that I referred to above. The meaning of the term “Ethiopia” itself has undergone considerable changes since it was originally coined by the ancient Greeks to identify all dark skinned peoples. It is only in modern times that an irony regarding its meaning started to manifest itself. For, to most outsiders, “Ethiopia” became simply the state identified as such on Africa’s political maps. Hence, not surprisingly, most outsiders simply assume an “Ethiopian” to be any person born within the borders of this African state; just like anyone born in Kenya is a Kenyan or any person born in Nigeria is a Nigerian. Ironically, to many of the persons known as “Ethiopians” to the outside world, to be or not to be an Ethiopian has been, and continues to be, a very contentious matter. Because, even after its application became restricted to a specific area of North East Africa, its meaning has been undergoing a continuous shift.

The famous historian Edward Gibbon is perhaps one of the first foreign authorities to apply the term “Ethiopia” to a specific region of North East Africa. He further narrowed down the meaning of the term “Ethiopians” to refer to a people adhering to a particular religion when he wrote “Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by which they were forgotten.”⁶ From this we can easily deduce that by “the Ethiopians” Gibbon must have meant the Coptic Christian societies of Amhara and Tigray, two of the major ethnic groups occupying the northern part of the present Ethiopian state. The enemies he referred to must have also meant the partly Muslim and partly “pagan” Oromos and the purely Muslim Affars whose settlement forms an arc stretching from the South-western to the North-eastern border of this legendary Christian kingdom. The areas beyond the Christian enclave’s Northern boundaries were also inhabited by other Cushitic speaking Muslim peoples of the present-day Eritrean low-

lands, thus completing the encirclement alluded to by Gibbon. In this sense, the picture of a besieged Christian Ethiopian kingdom was an historical truth. Until very recent times, this Christian enclave was referred to as Abyssinia (or Habasha) by Europeans, the Arabs and other peoples of North East Africa. The ordinary inhabitants of this area commonly identify themselves as being Habasha to this very day.

Breaking out of their besiegement and turning the table on "the enemies of their religion" remained the main pre-occupation of successive rulers of this Christian entity down through the centuries. Breaching the siege laid by the enemies of their religion and subduing these age-old enemies became two interlocking objectives. Gaining access to and benefiting from the support of their fellow Christian powers of Europe became both an end and a means to achieve these objectives. Pinning their hopes on the solidarity of fellow Christian powers reached its zenith during the 16th century when the very survival of their realm was being threatened by a resurgent form Islam. The arrival of the Portuguese in the region around the same time proved propitious and hence served as the first incident of European involvement in the ambition to lift this siege. Thereafter, contact with Europe continued to gradually increase attaining an unprecedented frequency during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Due to her millennium long-slumber, the social structure of Gibbon's Ethiopia retained an essentially archaic medieval nature when such a heightened interaction with the modern, Eurocentric world started taking place. The Ethiopian Emperors, whose encounter with a growing number of the messengers of Western powers⁷ woke them up to the reality of the backwardness of their society, were forced to add casting off this anachronism to the above two ambitions that they inherited from their ancestors. It was the eagerness to step out of this backwardness in as short a time as possible while at the same time pursuing the age-old agenda of subjugating the neighbouring peoples that drove one of their most ambitious ones, Emperor Tewdros, to the brink of insanity.⁸

Emperor Tewdros considered subjugating the Muslim and Galla (Oromo) enemies of his country as God's main purpose for lifting him from "dust" to become a crowned emperor. His successor, the Tigrean Emperor Yohannes, obviously inherited the same mentality and thus started his reign by proclaiming to the Muslim peoples that he was in the process of subduing "to adopt his faith or leave the country."⁹ To him, as to all his descendants, being a Muslim and an Ethiopian at the same time was clearly incompatible. In fact, opposing the Muslim and Galla (i.e., Oromo) enemies inevitably became the core defining feature of the patriotism of these emperors and their fellow Ethiopians.¹⁰

As it turned out, Ethiopian rulers of the latter part of the 19th century succeeded beyond their wildest dreams in turning the table on the age-old enemies of their religion.¹¹ This is not the place to relate in detail how subduing their age-old enemies proved much easier to accomplish than the desire of forging a modern state out of their medieval principality. Much fuss is made out of the fact that Ethiopia succeeded in averting direct European colonization. Two truths are concealed by this picture of an exceptionally independent minded African society foiling the designs of European colonial powers. Firstly, the survival of Ethiopia's "independence" is perhaps much more due to the ambitions of European powers cancelling each other out than Ethiopian valor excelling that of the Ashantis, the Senegalese, the Zulus, etc. Secondly, the Ethiopians succeeded in tapping the sympathy fostered in Europe over the centuries in favour of their country as a legendary Christian enclave to acquire enough material and technical assistance to completely and suddenly subdue their age-old enemies. The present Ethiopian entity that resulted from this process, hence, ended up in encompassing the areas occupied by : (1)) a major portion of the genuine Ethiopians of Gibbon, or Abyssinians, (2) almost all of her former enemies, and (3) even many others with whom she did not have any contact prior to the last decades of the nineteenth century.

It is the entity that came about in this manner that was made to appear as a modern nation state in recent decades thus generating

an ironic situation. This entity's officially projected sense of patriotism not only failed to apply to the "former enemies" but was also based on the negation of the dignity and existence of these inhabitants of the expanded state. Despite the similarities between Ethiopia and the other African countries, no where else does a similar situation exist. And it is this ironic situation that generated, as it continues to do, the debate regarding who an Ethiopian is. And this latest form of irony did not come about immediately after the birth of the new entity, but developed during the course of the history of particularly the post-World War II era.

This is so because the individuals who initially started ruling over the expanded new entity did not need to conceal its division into the "motherland" and dependencies as was common at the time. Two factors made this possible. Firstly, in the conquerors' medieval conception of the nature of the state, any territory or people that has submitted to their supremacy was considered as part and parcel of the realm. Clapham puts his finger on this traditional attitude of Ethiopian emperors when he states: "It (Ethiopia) constituted an empire, not simply in the formal sense that it was ruled by an emperor, but equally in that it embodied a claim to universal domination, and sought to govern any people whom it was able to bring under its control."¹² Traditionally, all persons or communities that have accepted the domination by and control of the rulers were assumed to constitute the sum total of the subject population. In this form of conceptualisation, the sovereign is the state, as aptly concluded by Louis 14th of France. Secondly, the application of this type of conception of the state to a newly expanded Ethiopian entity was occurring at a time when other powers were also creating more recent forms of empires made up of the "homelands" and dependencies. Hence, the official reference to the state as the Ethiopian Empire was essentially correct in both senses of the meaning of imperialism. And the initial masters of the present entity had no problem with this conceptualization of the realm that they were dominating.

Later local and international developments, however, started complicating the representation of the nature of the Ethiopian state. In particular, as the number of occasions when putting up a façade of a modern statehood started to proliferate, making the concealment of the reality of Ethiopia's imperial nature became increasingly necessary. On the other hand, genuinely doing away with the inequalities and injustices emanating from the imperial state structure and political practice threatened to erode the privileges of the rulers and their community. Thus, the habit of projecting the realm as a cohesive nation-state while actually managing it as an empire started developing.

NOTES

1. For more details on the imperial nature of the Ethiopian state see: (1) Sisai Ibsa and Bonnie Holcomb, *The Invention of Ethiopia : The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990) (2) Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868 - 1992* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993) and Edmund Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia : From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1988).
2. K. Tronvoll, and O. Aadland, *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia - An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?* (Oslo, Norway:Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 1995): 25.
3. Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder and London : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p.184.
4. Teshale Tibebe, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896 - 1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1995), p. 176.
5. K. Tronvoll, and O. Aadland, *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia - An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?* (Oslo, Norway : Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 1995) : 23.
6. Quoted by Richard Greenfield in *Ethiopia : A New Political History* (London : Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. ix.

- 7 . For example, Rubenson writes that during the decades 1830 - 1855 "Ethiopia was flooded by a great number of European travellers and missions of every kind and description." S. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi, Lusaka : Heinemann, 1976), p. 55.
8. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 27.
9. Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia : A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 87.
10. In the speech that served as the government's pretext to imprison him, the leader of the All Amhara Peoples Organization, Asrat Woldeyes, identifies Orthodox Christianity and the Amhara people as the pillars of the Ethiopian state. On other occasions he has stated the existence of a dissonance between being a Muslim and an Ethiopian patriot. This is a testimony of the continuation of this spirit to this very day.
11. That "most of the plateau peoples (meaning Amhara and Tigray) feared the Gallas as terrible enemies persisted upto recent times as it likely does todate." See Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia : A New Political History* (London : Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 54.
12. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 23.

Chapter 7

CONFLICTING IMAGES OF ETHIOPIA AND THE STATE- MANAGEMENT STRATEGY OF THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT

The Imperial Ethiopian Government of Emperor Haile Selassie became the first Ethiopian regime that found it increasingly necessary to juggle these conflicting images of the realm due to a number of global, continental, regional and internal developments. On top of this, the Emperor wished to go down in history as the person who modernized the “ancient” state that he inherited from his ancestors. On the other hand, the policy of treating the Ethiopian Empire as a nation state combined with growing interaction with the world at large only helped to deepen the conqueror/conquered cleavage. Systematically removing the factors that contributed to the alienation of many communities from the state and its officials was resisted by the managers of the Ethiopian state. The decision to equate the culture, language and history of the ruling Amharas to that of the “nation” ended up in alienating even the closely related Tigriniya-speaking people. This appropriation of the status of “nation” by just one of the many communities that inhabit the empire resulted in an increasing number of other peoples rejecting the resulting official version of “Ethiopian” identity. Cataloguing the incidents and factors that influenced the pursuit of this policy will be attempted hereunder.

SLAVES AND *GEBBARS*: PRE-MODERN SOCIAL SECTORS

At the time she managed to subdue and started ruling over her neighbors, Ethiopia was a slave-owning medieval state. The picture of the social structure took on an even more compounded nature after the subjugation of the "age-old enemies" added a new social sector born out of a peculiar system of exploitation imposed on the conquered societies. In this system, known as the *gebbar* system, members of the conquered peoples were allotted as tillers and personal servants, along with their land, to the commanders of the conquering hordes, their retinue, to the Crown and to the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In these conquered parts of the country a social hierarchy, with the slaves and the *gebbars* at the bottom and the emperor, his princes and the senior clergy at the top, was thus created.

For this new entity to enter into the modern world and to be accepted as a nation-state, phasing out both her medieval social features and erasing the conqueror/conquered cleavage became an unavoidable necessity. Any attempt to address one aspect of this dual mission seemed to affect the other. The erosion of one or the other often posed great dangers to the privileges particularly of the descendants of the conquerors. The survival of the entity, however, increasingly depended on putting up a façade of modernity and an image of a cohesive nation state. Thus arose the attempt to project a single Ethiopian identity and patriotism without sufficiently addressing the reality of the conqueror/conquered cleavage as well as the existence of pre-modern class formations.

The first occasion when lending an image of a cohesive modern state to Ethiopia became necessary was when she applied to become a member of the League of Nations. The Swedish military advisor to the Ethiopian Government of the day, General Virgin, equated the Ethiopia of the time with European countries of the middle ages.¹ This in itself would have caused a problem in approving Ethiopia's application for admission to the League of Nations. But there was another even more glaring problem that

could not be overlooked before admitting Ethiopia into the community of modern nation states, i.e., slavery.

Estimates of slave population in the Ethiopia of the 1930s vary greatly. Some records indicate that out of an estimated total population of 8 millions in 1935 slaves accounted for up to 500,000.² The Italians claimed that they set "free" 420,000 when they conquered the country in that year, which lends credibility to the figure of half a million. Estimates made in the late 1920s go even as far as putting the slave population at "a quarter, or even a third" of the total.³ According to some newspaper reports of 1932 "It is estimated that 2,000,000 people were still living in slavery in Abyssinia (the name Ethiopia was still more commonly known by at the time) during the past year."⁴ Seen against the estimated total population of 8 millions, that the slave population in the 1920s could have been as high as 25% appears credible. At the time Ethiopia won admission to the League of Nations in September 1923, she did so by accepting "the 1919 Convention of Saint Germain by which she promised to make particular efforts to ensure the suppression of slavery in all its forms and also trading in negroes on land and sea."⁵ European news reporters, who have an unusually consistent habit of putting the most positive spin to the deeds of Ethiopian rulers, were declaring almost ten years later that "The Emperor is now industriously engaged in carrying out the measures for the liberation of slaves."⁶ This industrious engagement was actually nothing more than promising to end slavery within a period of 15 to 20 years.⁷ In the event, the job was done much more precipitously, ironically thanks to the invasion by Italian fascists barely three years later. Were these slaves, who could account for a quarter of the population of the Ethiopian entity of the time, Ethiopians? Did their owners consider them fellow Ethiopians?

The same questions apply to all the conquered peoples and particularly to the *gebbars*, whose status was not much different from that of those held in direct bondage. Again, it is in the 1930s that the status of these conquered peoples started drawing the attention of the world. In the lead up to their invasion of Ethiopia,

the Italian fascists tended not to pay much attention to the proceedings of the League of Nations. They were much more interested to work behind the scenes on the fears of the British and the French of a possible Italian-German alliance to win the tacit approval of these powers for Italy's ambition of expansion in Eastern Africa. So, on many occasions only the views of the pro-Ethiopia wing of the League's council was heard. But the memorandum that the Italians presented on September 4, 1935, took the council members by surprise and stunned all those who were advocating for Ethiopia. The memorandum catalogued a long array of reasons to demonstrate "the illegitimacy of Ethiopia's claim to nationhood."⁸ The main thrust of Italian argument was that "there was not one Ethiopia but two."⁹ The memorandum stated that "Ethiopia was not a single, homogeneous state but instead territorially, politically and ethnically divided between the subject peoples of the lowlands and the Amharic conquerors of the plateau."¹⁰ The Italians suggested that two different levels of action are needed to end the anachronism of Ethiopia's backwardness: "The governing Amharas of the central plateau might be reformed administratively, but the subject peoples living on the frontiers needed not to be reformed but to be rescued."¹¹ They went further and stated that "the Harari, Galla, Somali, Sidama and other peoples which have for centuries formed separate national entities, should be removed from Abyssinian oppression."¹² And Baer admits that Italian argument failed to persuade the League Council "not because it contained errors of fact, for much of what Italy asserted was true"¹³ but basically because of the abuse of facts for propaganda purposes. Such an abuse of facts notwithstanding, the Italians did paint the reality as perceived by the concerned peoples, the ordinary Ethiopian officials and knowledgeable participants in the proceedings of the League Council, as stated by Baer.

Thus started the official recognition even by foreign powers of the existence of "two Ethiopias." The British, who treated the above Italian memorandum with the contempt that it deserved as a piece of self-serving propaganda, were themselves not averse to put to cynical use the legitimate grievances of these conquered

communities. As the preparation to evict the Italian fascists from the Horn of Africa got under way, British authorities in the Sudan discussed about sending "Courteney Brocklehurst into southern Ethiopia with a promise to the Galla people that if they rose against the Italians they would be protected from future 'Amhara overlordship' as well."¹⁴ This plan was quashed only after Churchill's intervention was achieved by Emperor Haile Sillasie's appeal which included the promise to "institute a reasonable degree of local autonomy."¹⁵ The plan to incite the Gallas (Oromos) to rise up against Italian occupation on the promise that "Amhara overlordship" would not be restored is a testimony to British awareness of the futility of appealing to a single Ethiopian patriotism. In fact, that the Emperor's official form of patriotism was in conflict with that of the Oromo and other southern peoples was evidently obvious to the British.

From that time on, most sophisticated Ethiopian officials found it increasingly necessary to refute the existence of these "two Ethiopias." At the same time, they started to increasingly portray their country as a single entity, just like Britain, France or Sweden. The less sophisticated Ethiopian officials, however, often took offence at being lumped together with people they considered their subjects. Such an attitude was displayed by the "patriots" Dejazmatch Wolde Mariam and Fitawrari Zelleka when, along with their followers, they sought refuge in British administered Kenya in the late 1930s. During their escape from the conquering Italians through south-western Ethiopia, they ended up "pressing boys and youths from the southern provinces into services as porters when all their mules died. They expressed some surprise when these youths were treated no differently from any other Ethiopian refugees once the column arrived in Kenya."¹⁶ One can imagine how insulted the Dejazmatch and Fitawrari must have felt to be lumped together with beings that they viewed merely as replacements for their mules.

The existence of a distinction between their status and that of the conquered peoples continued to be freely and candidly expressed by many ordinary Ethiopian officials. While their sophis-

ticated counterparts were attempting to hide the existence of such a distinction with a view to portraying Ethiopia as a cohesive modern state, ordinary officials continued to brag of their superior status. A mere corporal was, for example, heard stating that "The Galla (Oromo) are Amhara's slaves—they do as they are told"¹⁷ as late as the 1950s. It was also obvious to many foreign observers that the Governors of the southern provinces and their officers "as often as not looked on their provinces as conquered fiefs,"¹⁸ which they obviously were. To these kinds of officials, referring to their country as Ethiopia and to themselves as Ethiopians did not pose any problem. But looking on their subject peoples as fellow Ethiopians would have struck them as at least problematic. Similarly, members of the conquered peoples also could not possibly imagine as belonging to the same category of people as the officials. Hence, as momentous events started unfolding in the rest of Africa during the decade of the 1960s, whether such communities as Oromos, Somalis, Sidamas, and Walayitas could be considered as Ethiopians remained open to question. Similarly, just as *asgebbars* and slaves could not seriously be considered as Ethiopians, the status of all Muslims remained vague, to say the least. These sets of dilemmas persisted even as developments in the rest of Africa intensified the need to portray Ethiopia as a single cohesive entity.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF AFRICAN ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENTS

Until the latter half of the 1950s, Ethiopia's neighbors were the British, French and Italians, who were the colonial masters of neighboring African countries. When minor inter-state incidents arose, Ethiopian governors of the provinces bordering these European colonial holdings normally dealt with their European counterparts. Hence, they normally took their own status to be identical with that of the European colonial officials with whom they interacted. They had no doubts about their superiority over the African subjects of European colonialists as well as over the peoples that they

were ruling. The attitude of school children was no different. Until the early 1960s, most of these youths had no doubts “of their superiority over Europe’s African colonies, and indeed over all other Africans” and often “compared themselves —albeit unfavorably—with Sweden, Britain, France and USA.”¹⁹ As they increasingly got exposed to the political concepts that underpin the legitimacy of these modern states, some of these students started questioning the nature of Ethiopia. Others chose to dispense with a deep investigation of the imperial roots of the state by simply agreeing that “there is no time to worry how the country came into existence—it exists. What must matter in the future is what ‘being an Ethiopian’ means.”²⁰ Defining what “being an Ethiopian” meant started to occupy the minds of many mature students attending the various secondary and post-secondary academic institutions during the 1960s. They seemed to grab every available opportunity to pose the question “Who is the Ethiopian?” That a poem of the same title, by an Oromo university student, won almost universal acclamation serves as an indication that the issue was occupying the minds of many. Smith aptly observes that articulating a nationalist agenda often emanates from the concerned intellectuals’ crisis of identity. He writes “The questions then arose: who am I? Who are we? What is our purpose and role in life and in society?”²¹ The verse by the Oromo university student epitomises such an intellectual soul searching. It is possible that, to him, his self perception and the officially projected Ethiopian identity appeared incongruous thus leading him to pose the question. Yet, the fact that even those whose identity matched with the official one much more closely acclaimed his verse indicates that they too were grappling with the issue. In passing, we should note that this poet (Ibsa Gutama) practically answered his question by later on becoming one of the founding members of the Oromo Liberation Front.

Such a widespread intellectual soul searching seemed to gather momentum at a time when the wind of change that was gusting throughout European ruled Africa started to also breeze on the Ethiopian highlands. Ethiopian rulers, assuming that their coun-

try was ahead of the newly independent African states, felt duty bound to give them a helping hand. One manner in which this was carried out was bound to leave a lasting mark on the relation between the authorities and young educated "Ethiopians." This was the experience of Africans who were granted scholarships to study at the newly created University College of Addis Ababa. Some 200 scholarships were granted to students from other African countries in 1958 alone although around that time only 4% of Ethiopian school-age children were going to school as opposed to 40% in the rest of Africa.²² Instead of evincing a feeling of awe and appreciation for the advancement that should have resulted from her luck in avoiding European colonialism, these scholarship students expressed shock at the "comparative economic and educational backwardness of Ethiopia."²³ In addition, they tended to be much more political and articulated their views without the kind of fear and hesitation that was instilled in their Ethiopian classmates from childhood. Coming to maturity at the time when pan-Africanism was still a current pre-occupation of conscious Africans, students from other African countries were not hesitant in castigating the practice of open official "tribal favoritism" that they witnessed in Ethiopia. Before the Ethiopian students had time to absorb the new experience of comparing their country now unfavourably, not any more with European countries, but with the former "dependencies" of Europe, the message of their country's backwardness was driven home in a much more dramatic manner. Some of their predecessors, who were already privy to this reality, staged an unsuccessful coup d'état in December 1960, during which they broadcast a statement that declared "While the newly formed independent African nations are making progress, Ethiopia is lagging behind and this fact is now realised."²⁴ Educated youngsters, from then on, considered ending the imperial system of government as the only sure way to speed up progress and to end the embarrassing state of backwardness.

The beginning of the end of European direct colonialism in Africa became an additional compelling reasons why Ethiopian authorities had to step up the projection of their empire as a na-

tion-state. Prior to this period, Ethiopian authorities could afford to present their country either as an empire or as a nation state as the situation demanded. But after the 1960s, when imperialism was discredited and the neighbouring empires were being dismantled, Ethiopian officials were forced to scrupulously avoid making references to the imperial roots of the entity's formation. They had to increasingly underplay its imperial features while attempting to project it as an ancient nation-state. In one African forum after another they found themselves defending as an historical fact that Ethiopia's nationhood stretches back for three thousand years.²⁵ In reality, however, observers were at the time still concluding that "Menelik's empire is not yet a nation."²⁶ The expectation that Ethiopia would sooner or later be transformed into a nation is indicated by this observation and many others like it. How will this come about? What kind of nation-state building principles will be pursued to do so? We will return to these questions later on.

Incidentally, some thirty years after the above expectation of Ethiopia's status attaining modern nationhood was voiced, commentators were concluding that this had not yet been realized. The Norwegian Observers of the May 1995 elections after enumerating those attributes that qualify an entity as a modern state, concluded: "Ethiopia did not meet the above requirements of a 'modern' state."²⁷ This is after three changes of regimes that have used three different policies to reconfigure the entity on a modern basis.

REPERCUSSIONS OF MERGER WITH ERITREA AND THE RISE OF SOMALI IRREDENTISM

In the meantime, two events closer at home compounded the Ethiopian authorities' attempt to portray their empire as a nation state. These were the incorporation of Eritrea and the emergence of Somali irredentism. Interestingly, both developments forced Ethiopian officials to start developing two contradictory images of Ethiopia. This became necessary because of an irony that surrounded

both the Somali and Eritrean questions. The Eritrean question was an internal one that became external as the result of a section of Gibbon's Ethiopians being annexed by Italy and being incorporated into her colony; Eritrea. Thus there was a significant proportion of Eritrean society that worked for re-integration with their kith and kin living south of the boundary drawn by the colonial authorities. On the other hand, the Somalis were always outside traditional Ethiopia, in fact one of the traditional enemies, and their case became an internal issue only because a part of them found themselves physically situated within the boundaries of the present-day Ethiopian entity. Just like some of the Eritreans, these also harbored the craving to join their fellow Somalis living across the boundary drawn by colonial powers.

To entice support for unification from those Eritreans that used to be part and parcel of Gibbon's Ethiopia, the authorities had to revive and exaggerate the myth of an ancient Christian state. For, as Brigadier Longrigg, a one time British chief administrator of Eritrea testified, "racially and culturally the Eritrean highlands are Ethiopian."²⁸ In addition to racial and cultural factors that united this sector of Eritrean society with their northern Ethiopian kins, there was also a religious factor. For, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church wielded an influence in these parts of Eritrea no less than in the rest of northern Ethiopia. And the role of this Church has always been perceived as "the besieged repository of true Ethiopian nationalism."²⁹ Inevitably, appealing to the "true" Ethiopian patriotism of those Eritreans disposed in favor of unification with Ethiopia demanded that its religious basis also be revived and exaggerated. Ethiopia's history also was made to stretch back to the Axumite period in order to harp on the common historical background that state officials shared with the part of Eritrean society that was more amenable to the courtship for unification. Thus, the term "Ethiopian" increasingly became restricted only to those people who could claim descent from the Axumites. In addition, professing Coptic Christianity became the other factor that could qualify one for admission into this form of Ethiopian identity.

This was taking place at a time when the "integration" of those that were already within the borders of the rest of the Ethiopian entity had not yet even been attempted with any degree of seriousness. Observers were stating that "The process of creating a national atmosphere in which the Oromo (Galla), many of whom are Muslim, and other non-Christian groups can feel themselves fully integrated, is not yet complete."³⁰ The effort to seal unity between Eritrea and "Ethiopia" by harping on the image of an ancient Christian principality was in fact working against such an integration. The officially projected Ethiopian identity failed to embrace most of the peoples of southern Ethiopia as well as all those whose religion was not Coptic. Such peoples as the Oromo and most Muslim communities perhaps did not have recourse to an alternative discourse to face the official imaging of the country. The most they seemed to be able to achieve was sporadic localized uprisings; which they were doing with growing frequency. By and large, they appeared condemned to endure humiliation and alienation and could at most harbour anger and frustration. The Somalis, on the other hand, could count on their fellow nationals to articulate and lead opposition to living in a country that refused to recognize them as bona fide citizens. As a result, starting in the early 1960s Somalis on both sides of the Ethio-Somali border developed a habit of condemning "Euro-Abyssinian colonialism."³¹ The more Ethiopian authorities played up the Coptic nature of Ethiopianness, the more the Somalis and Oromos felt alienated. Not surprisingly, the call for revolt by the newly independent Somali Republic against "Euro-Abyssinian colonialism" found an eager audience not only in the Somali inhabited parts but also in large areas settled by Muslim Oromos.³²

Eritrea's incorporation into Ethiopia thus unexpectedly resulted in heightening the grievances of other southern peoples. To begin with, the incorporation tended first to divide Eritrean society itself. The historical, cultural and religious basis on which the merger was justified did not apply to the lowland and Muslim half of Eritrea just as it did not apply to the southern parts of Ethiopia. This led to an interesting struggle among Eritrean nationalists

regarding Eritrea's image. Ironically, those Eritreans with the least historical and linguistic affiliation with the Arab world espoused an Arab identity for their country basically because of religious reasons; which was opposed by the semitic speaking Eritreans again because of religious considerations. The fight over Eritrea's identity spawned an even more fierce competition over championing the cause of its liberation from "Ethiopian colonialism." This competition started taking shape after even the unionist elements of the Eritrean Christian highlands began experiencing disillusionment with the incorporation with the "motherland."

The regression of Eritrea's political life in order to fall in line with that of the rest of Ethiopia was partly responsible for this disillusionment. In addition, the official use of Tigrinya and Arabic was scrapped by the imperial authorities forcing Eritrean school children to start learning Amharic instead. Eritrean staff members of government offices felt humiliated to come second to other Ethiopian officials although they often felt that they were better qualified. In addition, Eritreans tended to openly gang up to acquire access to jobs, business and educational opportunities. They started practicing "tribalism" with the same vigor that the Amharas did but without the officially sanctioned superstructure that hinted the latter's legitimacy. The Amhara monopoly of practising "tribal favoritism" started being challenged in practice. The Eritreans in schools, universities and work places loudly spoke in Tigrinya thus drawing a line between themselves and the rest. They tended to patronize bars owned by other Eritreans out of which blared loud Tigrinya music. This, at a time when the imperial government was busy smashing Oromo musical troupes and arresting youths who attempted to form Oromo musical bands.

The behavior of the much more favored Eritreans pained some members of the less favored societies of southern Ethiopia. Some of the latter were put off by the aggressive manner in which the Eritreans deliberately drew attention to their distinctiveness. In others, it intensified the search for one's real identity and an increasing realization of its failure to match the official imaging of the "nation." The feeling of guilt to associate with persons from

your community, speaking your language and flaunting other aspects of your identity, which was instilled in the minds of many southern educated youths, was slowly being reversed. These bystanders of the Eritrean-Amhara confrontation were unnoticeably drawing lessons from the developments that were taking place within the social milieu of Gibbon's Ethiopia. At the same time, the predominantly Muslim Eritrean rebels of the early 1960s were engaged in making a common cause with Muslims from the south who were living or studying in the Arab/Muslim countries. The behavior and actions of Eritreans both at home and abroad, Christians as well as Muslims, deliberately or inadvertently, intensified the growing re-awakening of the national consciousness of some members of the conquered southern communities and to fire them up against the injustice of the system that refused to recognize and embrace them as equal citizens. If even the more favored Eritreans saw reasons for rebellion, these ones could point to innumerable cases of insult, exploitation, humiliation, etc. that needed to be responded to.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MERGER WITH ERITREA

The process that led to the merger of Eritrea with the rest of Ethiopia, on the other hand, did provide a unique opportunity to lay the legal basis of a more cohesive state. The recognition and respect of "common legal rights and duties for all members"³³ serves as the fundamental foundations of a unified national entity. Updating Ethiopia's so-called Constitution in order to pave the way for merger with Eritrea (which had a more democratic constitution drawn up by the UN) could have served as an opportune moment to lay such a legal basis for a more united Ethiopia. Unfortunately, instead of creating such a basis, the constitutional implication of Eritrea's merger with the rest of Ethiopia deepened the contradictory aspects of the authorities' state management strategy. The so-called constitution of 1931 had to be scrapped because it openly contradicted the concept of the legal equality of citizens. In fact it was

unequivocal in stating what groups it was empowering. The preamble of this document reads like an interesting fiction about Ethiopia's history. It announces that the Ethiopian Emperors, who reigned before the birth of Christ, ruled over an area that extended as far south as Kenya and Uganda, as far north as Egypt and stretched the whole way to Persia. It concludes that "Ethiopian kings that lived before the birth of Christ had no other attempt or ambition than making Ethiopia out of the whole of Africa and to rule the same."³⁴ Such historical fiction aside, this document's main legal pre-occupation was to define the interests of the sectors of the Ethiopian society that it was meant to uphold. Towards the conclusion of its preamble the main purposes of the document are listed as insuring the transfer of the king of king's dignity, interests and power and all rights due to him to his descendants. It then goes on to uphold the dignity and interests of the princes, "the colonisers"³⁵ (*aqnyiwoch*) and the aristocrats and the same being handed down to their descendants. (This is the document that the Emperor portrayed as the proclamation that spelled the defeat of feudalism in his memoir.³⁶) Clearly, the category "colonizers" was included in reference to the conquerors of the southern peoples, whose privileged status was to be protected and passed on to posterity. At the time this so-called constitution was granted by the Emperor, there was evidently no need to pretend about the equality of the inhabitants before the law. Other archaic aspects of this document also stood in the way of winning international backing for merger with Eritrea. Thus, as a gesture to found the country's system of government on a more modern and inclusive charter re-granting the country another constitution became necessary.

The merger with Eritrea, thus, supposedly required the amendment of the so-called constitution of 1931. In actual fact, the so-called amended Constitution of 1955 is so different from the previous one that it can easily be considered as a totally new one. In the latter document, any reference to the "colonizer" category is of course missing. But in practice the colonial relationship between the southern communities and the Ethiopian state and its officials remained unchanged. In addition, the gulf that always separated

the authorities' pronouncements on social and political matters from their actual practice came to equally apply to the emerging legal system as well. Scholler and Brietzke put their finger on this fact when they write:

The 1955 Constitution created a huge gap between the law and the realities of the exercise of power. Five Western jural postulates (basic values) can be identified in the written Constitution: the modernisation of administration; the widening of political participation through a Parliament; the establishment of an independent judiciary committed to the Rule of Law; the doctrine of the separation of powers; and the inclusion of a catalogue of human rights. Over time, these values competed with three other constitutional postulates which drew support from traditional laws and practices: the consolidation of the power and legitimacy of the monarchy; the mutuality of support between the State and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; and the Amhara's continued domination of political life.³⁷

Thus, in practice the cultivation of a feeling of entitlement to "a common legal rights and duties for all members" of the Ethiopian entity, the central feature of modern statehood, was subverted by the inertia of traditional privileges and attitudes. For, the competition between the above two tendencies identified by Scholler and Brietzke was as often as not resolved in favor of the latter. The resulting feeling of alienation persisted in the conquered territories as well as by Eritreans who faced the traditionally entrenched attitudes towards the purpose of the state as a vehicle for the promotion of Amhara hegemony.

Internal and external developments thus continued to widen such a separation between "the realities of exercise of power" and legal and political posturing. The imperial government and its officials appeared to declare one thing but continued to do the direct opposite. This is so mainly because the Emperor's government was trying to reassure two sets of audiences whose views and interests invariably stood at loggerheads. These were the colonizers

that could explicitly be named in the 1931 Constitution and who had to continuously be reassured. The other audience that was being addressed were the foreign powers who needed to be persuaded that the promise to reform and modernize the realm was still on course. A third audience—members of the conquered communities—remained unacknowledged, although that it was following the contradictory declarations of the authorities was in no doubt. Even titles of Government institutions had to be fashioned with a view to giving the foreign donors one message and the government's most important constituency—the colonizers whose interests were enshrined in the 1931 Constitution—another message. For example, as a result of pressures from the World Bank and other foreign agencies, the Emperor's Government was forced to create a "Ministry of Land Reform" which, not perhaps unintentionally, was rendered in the Amharic version as "Ministry of Land-holding." The message given to the foreigners is one of "reform" and to the "colonizers" it was "Don't worry! The status quo will be maintained." Foreign assistance gained in order to promote the so-called modernization also in practice was very often made to serve the opposite end as stated by one writer who observed that "the tight hold of the landowning families makes all the outward semblances of a modern state seem quite ineffective—and where foreign aid further secures the status quo."³⁸ The devastation that accompanied the Swedish funded Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU) came to epitomize such an inversion of the purposes for which foreign aid was secured. Swedish provided development aid to upgrade farming practices in the Arsi region occasioned the wholesale eviction of peasants from their traditional homeland. Many communities were reeling from a similar abuse of foreign funded "economic development" initiatives when the imperial government came tumbling down. Reconciling the privileges of the descendants of conquerors and the well-being of many peoples proved unachievable. In general, attitude towards socio-economic reforms continued to reveal the existence of "two Ethiopias" that wanted to go in two different directions, as will be elaborated later on.

THE CONTRADICTIONARY POLICY OF COERCIVE ASSIMILATION

We do not know if the managers of the Ethiopian state during the imperial era formally deliberated on how to cultivate an integrated Ethiopian nationhood. By the mid-1960s, however, some observers were concluding that "The neglect over the years of a positive program of national unity throughout the empire is beginning to tell in Eritrea, Harar, Bale and Sidamo."³⁹ At the time, the non-Abyssinian sector of the Eritrean society and Oromo and Somali inhabitants of Harar, Bale and Sidamo were conducting armed opposition to imperial rule. Foreign experts saw in the mushrooming of insurgencies in these parts a failure to create a sufficiently integrative nation-building policy. As has already been stated, we do not know if the ruling elite arrived at a similar diagnosis and if they formally deliberated on a policy of national integration. Foreign academics that were taxing their minds and disciplines to prescribe (or to describe what they believed to be) an official policy of integration, were not lacking. The Canadian Jesuit and one-time professor at the Haile Selassie I University, Savard, is one of many. He opined "The history and culture of all peoples can and must play a part in developing the nation now that its frontiers have attained some measure of stability."⁴⁰ He then went on to suggest how the best from all the component communities can be served up as a mixed salad of a composite Ethiopian culture. He listed these as: the Amhara's recognition of women's status, the Somali resolution of issues at the Shir or the council, the Gurage assembly, the Galla (Oromo) style of training and education and the egalitarianism of the Sidamo. How he arrived at these cultural attributes of the various peoples and whether they do actually apply is a matter of controversy that need not bother us here. What is more important is the author's recognition of the need to synthesize a new and inclusive "Ethiopian culture" out of all cultures of the peoples inhabiting the entity. He also advocated for re-interpreting what has been known as Ethiopian history to include that of the other peoples as well.

Christopher Clapham is perhaps the main exponent of the nature of the official nation-state-building policy of previous Ethiopian rulers. This can be summarised in one word: assimilation. Clapham does not explicitly state that the policy was deliberately crafted and practiced by the rulers. Instead he credits the peculiar nature of the identity of the assimilating milieu that he calls the "Amharic core." He describes this identity as "weakly defined" and having an element of "plasticity." What he concludes from this premise is so important that we have to quote it at length:

Being Amhara is much more a matter of how one behaves than of who one's parents were; and without this capacity for assimilating other peoples into a core culture which can be regarded as national, and not the exclusive property of a particular group of people, the Ethiopian state would probably have been unable to sustain itself in the first place. At the same time, it is precisely because Ethiopia has this core identity, associated with one people but also claiming a special national status, that it suffers from much more intense problems of national identity and integration than other African states, in which ethnicity is the result of the almost haphazard process by which different peoples were tossed by colonialism into a common political unit. Assimilation to the core identity, while it offers on the one hand the chance of participating in the national political system, involves on the other hand the subordination of one's own original affiliation.⁴¹

Clapham himself thus admits the contradiction embedded in the official policy of assigning to the ethnically diverse state the "core identity" of just one of the peoples; the Amharas. As a result, the officially projected "Ethiopian national identity" proved synonymous with the Amhara persona while negating the identities of other communities. Thus a person is more or less Ethiopian to the extent that he/she took on or aped Amharaness. One way to do this was by adopting some of the defining features of the "core Amhara culture." Clapham states that these are "largely (though

not exclusively) defined in terms of the language, religion and values of the Amharic core."⁴² And he posits that all individuals had to do in order to "reach positions not simply of power, but equally of authority and prestige" was to take on more and more of these features or in other words to assimilate to what he, at the same time calls, the "national political culture."⁴³

In practice what is "Amhara" became the "national" and whatever is associated with other communities was designated as "tribal." One who supports the promotion of Amharic language, culture, hegemony was contributing to the glory of the "nation." And anybody who spoke up for the interests of other communities was accused of practicing "tribalism" and of being divisive. The culture, language, history and identity of one of the peoples of Ethiopia was formally elevated to the "national" status and at the expense of that of the rest. One can cite evidence after evidence to demonstrate the official status of this exclusivist policy. For example, after broadcasting in the languages of other peoples became politically necessary, the Amharic language program continued to be labelled as "the national program" while other broadcasts were named after the particular ethnic group. Such a policy of discouraging "tribalism" on the surface may look similar to the one pursued in the rest of Africa where the new statesmen were "instilling in their followers the principle of 'dying as tribes and being born as nations.'"⁴⁴ Whether the process of dying as tribes and rising as nations will succeed in the African states that are pursuing this kind of nation-building policy is now becoming increasingly questionable.⁴⁵ Yet, only in very rare cases, if any, did one ethnic group mold an African state in its own image at the exclusion of the others. In fact, it is this reality that produced a peculiar political development in Ethiopia. The glorification of the cultural and historical attributes of the Amharas inevitably generated an eagerness by many members of other communities to reclaim and defend their own identities, cultures and history.

Another set of contradictions emanating from the official policy of cultivating a monocultural Ethiopia through a process of coercive assimilation has rarely been addressed. This policy confronted

two alternatives. It is implemented either selectively and thus resulted in the perpetual alienation of most non-Amharas from the officially projected Ethiopian persona or the process of individual assimilation had to be made wide enough to transform into Amharas all persons living within the borders of the entity. A growing unrest was bound to be the inevitable outcome of the former scenario. On the other hand, the policy of assimilation was being pursued merely in order to perpetuate domination. Under such a circumstance, affording all inhabitants admission to full citizenship status through assimilation threatened to dilute the very privileges that domination makes possible. In addition, assimilation was artificially made to work only in one direction, i.e., "to assimilate 'Others' (through Christian proselytization), not to be assimilated."⁴⁶ For such a one-way assimilation to succeed a certain degree of coercion was bound to be necessary. And according to an authority on the subject "Coerced assimilation and cultural oppression are policies likely to incur high costs and yield minimal benefits."⁴⁷ The pursuit of the policy of coercive and selective assimilation coupled with the attempt to lend a veneer of modernity to the state necessitated an increasing reliance on brute force. The extremely militarized regime of the Derg was only the culmination of a process that was started by the so-called modernizing emperors after the second half of the nineteenth century. The inability to craft a more participatory system of state management strategy fuelled rebellion by an increasing number of alienated communities. And this in turn forced the rulers to increasingly rely on force to legitimate their government and to preserve the realm.

The impact of Somali nationalism on the pursuit of fashioning and projecting a facade of nationhood for Ethiopia has been touched upon above. How the Somali call for rebellion found a fertile ground not only in the Somali inhabited areas but also among Oromos has also been referred to. Their most wide-reaching influence, however, had to do with countering the Ethiopian government language policy. Supposedly, the central feature of this policy was the eradication of all other languages and their replacement by Amharic. This policy started suffering a set-back when

reacting to Somali propaganda became necessary. The Somalis started broadcasting in their language as soon as the former British and Italian colonies merged to form the Somali Republic. The success of this process and its role in entrenching and expanding Somali nationalism encouraged the authorities to alphabetize and elevate the Somali language to become the medium of administration and education.⁴⁸ By the early 1970s, this undertaking had peaked with an aggressive drive to eradicate illiteracy. Many observers started commenting on the success of the process. Thus, Somalia became perhaps the first post-colonial Black African state to use an indigenous language as a medium of education and administration instead of languages retained from the colonial period. This in itself won the Somali authorities the envy of many nationalists. Its impact on the Somali inhabitants of Eastern Ethiopia was of course by far more dramatic. Their usual high level of self-esteem, so characteristic of nomadic communities, assumed new proportions. In addition, the message broadcast from Mogadishu in their language dealt with their legitimate right to self determination and touched on the prevailing reality of alienation of the ruled from the ruling group. To counter-act this aggressive propaganda beamed out of Mogadishu, Ethiopian authorities were forced to launch a Somali language radio program of their own. A first step was thus taken to officially admit the ethnic diversity of the realm. Things did not stop there.

By late 1960s, the Somali Republic was charting a course that would once again embroil it in a war with Ethiopia in order to annex the adjacent areas. To do this, Somali authorities joined the camp opposed to the one that Ethiopia belonged to; hence, their espousal of socialism and entering of treaties with the USSR. Their new alliance won them a wind-fall of modern military hardware. In addition, despairing in getting a sympathetic hearing of their case among Africans, they were turning more and more to the Arab and Muslim world for financial and diplomatic support. This resulted in Somalia becoming a member of the Arab League and the Islamic Conference Organization and getting a much more sympathetic hearing for their wish to carve a Greater Somalia.

The confidence born out of their growing military muscle and increasing support from the Arab and Muslim world engendered in the minds of Somali officials the desire to expand the area to which they were laying claim. This resulted in Oromos and Affars being targeted for co-option into the Somali nation. Greater Somali was thus re-defined in such a way to include almost all of Affarland and the whole of Eastern and Southern Oromia.

Somali propaganda net also had to be cast wide enough to embrace all the inhabitants of this new target area. Thus, they added an Oromo Language Radio program to their broadcasts that were already being avidly listened to by Somali speakers. Their primary audience was supposed to be Muslim Oromos living in the areas adjoining the Somali settlements in Eastern Oromia. The theme of their message was stressing the historic and religious differences between the Ethiopian officials and the people inhabiting this area. In addition, the radio program became the only vehicle for popularizing Oromo music. Again, this coincided with the time when the Ethiopian authorities were banning Oromo musical troupes and were imprisoning youngsters that were trying to form Oromo Musical Bands.

The Oromo language program of Radio Mogadishu proved much more popular than even the expectation of Somali authorities. In particular, the song "Bilisummaan Aannani!" (Liberation is milk) was listened to and hummed by Oromos living as far west as Wallagga. The message was taken up not just by the target Muslim Oromos of the East but even by the Protestants of western Oromia. The upshot was that the Ethiopian authorities also were compelled to react by launching an Oromo language radio program of their own. Just like the Somali authorities, they too intended to focus on eastern Oromia. Hence, their Oromo language broadcast facility was situated in Harar, but was listened to by all who could pick it up elsewhere as well. In Africa of the day, owning a radio broadcast service and having a state of one's own quite often corresponded. Imperceptibly the possibility of going one stage further and owning a state was being formed in the minds of the target communities. At least the Ethiopian authori-

ties' decision to join the competition to address Oromos and Affars in their languages was definitely negating their policy of gradually doing away with all non-Amharic languages. It also meant the reversal of their policy to portray Ethiopia as a monocultural entity.

THE IMPACTS OF MODERN EDUCATION

Emperor Haile Selassie's fans give him a well deserved credit for adopting education as a vehicle for modernization. One particular emphasis of that educational system was to increase the number of people who could speak Amharic. Hence, fluency in Amharic was made an essential pre-requisite for entry into government services and institutions of higher learning, thus buttressing the language policy stated above. The normal thing to do under the circumstances was to expand the opportunity for education to involve as many as possible in order to hasten the process of "national integration." But there were many practical factors that militated against such a possibility. Most schools were located in the Amhara dominated urban areas, particularly in the south, putting the indigenous population at a clear disadvantage. Coupled with the economic disadvantages that their status as tenant farmers imposed upon them, most peasant families from these areas could not dream of sending their children to school.

Even those who could afford came up against numerous other deterrent conditions. Most Muslim families, for example, were reluctant to send their children to primary schools because Ethiopian Orthodox priests were given a prominent role to teach religion to youngsters. And even those non-Muslim children who could afford to attend schools were ridiculed by their Amhara classmates on account of their names and Amharic accents. Most often such youngsters simply dropped out in order to avoid the daily ordeal of humiliation by their age peers. It is not unlikely that most of them carried a life-long grudge against a system that denied them the opportunity to self improvement through education. The little literacy that they achieved in the process, however, enabled

some of them to give services in their communities in reading and writing letters thus winning them a position of some influence. Others joined the armed forces as a last ditch effort to avoid returning to the gruelling and unrewarding life of peasant farmers. The elitist nature of the education system was, at the same time, affording their former Amhara classmates previously unheard of privileges and power. Some of these went abroad to complete their education to come back to well paying jobs and a relatively posh style of life. The drop-out could only look on with envy, anger and frustration. The bias of the system in favour of children from Amharic-speaking families could not be concealed.

This did not, however, deter some Oromos who had managed to rise in the imperial system by adhering to the rules of the game from attempting to duplicate themselves in mass. These individuals felt that other Oromos also could rise to power and privilege if only they got educated. For that matter they believed if educational opportunity was offered to an increasing number of Ethiopians the country's hope of shedding backwardness would be that much enhanced. Hence, some of them drew up a literacy program and started implementing it with vigor. Perhaps the most outstanding Oromo with this regard is the late General Tadesse Birru. His program of uplifting all inhabitants of the empire through a literacy program won him the respect of many progressive Ethiopians. This was at a time when he was still the epitome Amharized Oromo to such an extent that he was even mistaken for a full-fledged Amhara. He was, in addition, a devout Coptic Christian and chaired a citizens group that looked after the interests of Coptic pilgrims to the Holy Land. As the commander of a para-military police force, he had played a key role in quashing the 1960 coup d'etat thus displaying a loyalty to the Emperor beyond any doubt. It was his sense of "Ethiopian patriotism" that in fact led him to champion literacy for all and particularly for Oromos living within the environs of the capital. His attempt to uplift a significant sector of the non-Amhara population through a literacy program soon ran up against the un-stated policy of the imperial government; that education is meant primarily for chil-

dren from Amharic-speaking families. Reportedly he was advised not to educate "Gallas" by none other than the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habtewold, at the time. This is often identified as the event that turned the assimilated Ethiopian patriot Tadesse Birru into the father of modern Oromo nationalism.⁴⁹ From that time until his execution by Haile Selassie's successors in 1975 he rejected Ethiopian identity and started working to hasten the national awakening of the Oromos. The imperial government's disingenuous educational and language policy produced the direct result of what was intended in this case as well.

The officials of the Imperial Ethiopian Government evidently had a dilemma when it came to education. If they allowed unrestricted educational opportunity to all non-Amharas, then the privileges reserved for the descendants of the "colonizers," whose inheritance rights were enshrined in the 1931 Constitution, would be eroded. Withholding such an opportunity, on the other hand, meant the abandonment of the ambition to turn all the inhabitants of the entity into Ethiopians through a continuous process of Amharization. The end of imperial rule came about before the authorities were able to sort out this dilemma.

The education policy failed yet in another aspect as well. One role of education is to instill in the tender minds of school children the sense of a common history and patriotism. Birch considers "the creation of an educational system which gives children a sense of national identity, teaches them about their common history, and (directly or indirectly) inculcates patriotism"⁵⁰ as one of several essential steps in the national integrative process. The teaching of a common past was supposed to help the youths to visualize an equally common future. Did the teaching of history accomplish such a task in Ethiopia?

Ethiopian history was automatically made synonymous with that of Gibbon's Ethiopia, as has already been stated. As explained above, this became even more necessary in order to justify unification with Eritrea. Foreigners who were mesmerized with the exoticism of this version of Ethiopian history also contributed to this one-sided writing and teaching of Ethiopian history. Reference to

the history of other communities inhabiting the Ethiopian entity was as often as not non-existent. If any was made it was done in an offhand manner and likely in quite a disparaging way, thus enhancing the prevailing high self-esteem of one sector of the student population and the embarrassment of the few who came from non-Amhara backgrounds. Ullendorf, the British academic whose work on Ethiopian history won him the love and affection of the authorities, did so by making very damaging and pejorative remarks particularly about Oromos. The authorities' ill-advised tendency of equating Ethiopian history only with that of Gibbon's Ethiopia even after the state had for decades embraced a large percentage of the "enemies of her religion" was confirmed and reinforced by the works of these kinds of foreign academics.

Not surprisingly, Ethiopian history textbooks were thus either completely silent about other peoples or made pejorative remarks. As one writer commented, "the Amhara children who predominate in the schools do not learn of Kaffa before the time of its incorporation into the modern Ethiopia by Menelik II at the end of the nineteenth century."⁵¹ In skipping any mention about the glorious history of the Kaffa kingdom, the curriculum kept even those who were privileged enough to get an education to remain ignorant about a people close-by while studying the histories of France, Britain, China, the Americas, etc. The few school children coming from the Kaffa and other communities of course had their parallel lessons of history from their elders. The fact that school textbooks were silent about the history of their community perhaps forced them to treat Ethiopian history just as the history of another country like that of France, Britain, China, and the Americas that they were forced to study.

The situation that Oromo school children faced falls in a category of its own. Ignoring Oromo history was not sufficient to exorcise Oromo candidates for assimilation of their identity for fear that they might revert to it. Every possible attempt was made to portray being an Oromo as something of which one had to be ashamed. Distortions of facts and the outright fabrication of fiction were resorted to in order to make Oromo youngsters ashamed

of their past. Writings by Ethiopian clerics on the so-called "genesis" of the "Galla" abound in the literature. One such theory, by Alaga Taye, that stated that "the Galla emerged from the sea" was at one time actually taught in Ethiopian history classes. Other references to the Oromo in textbooks of Amharic literature often painted them as cowardly, uncouth, uncivilized, etc. group. When this is added to the theory of a recent aquatic birth of the people the image of a sub-human category is unmistakable. Not surprisingly, this fueled educated Oromo youngster's yearning to find out as much about their history as they could. At the same time, condemning the writings of such Ethiopian clerics as Taye and Bahre took a central place in the emerging discourse of Oromo scholars and politicians. The conscious elements of other southern peoples also found it increasingly necessary to engage in the same kind of initiative although the gravity of distortion appears to be the maximum for the Oromos. The official neglect or distortion of the histories of non-Abyssinian peoples once again produced the direct opposite urge of retrieving and publicizing their history. Thus, in Ethiopia competing interpretations of history has come to play a central role in the ongoing struggle for political power.

As has already been stated above, youngsters were being taught the history of distant peoples and countries while remaining ignorant about such large communities as the Oromo, Sidama, Walayita, etc. The World history textbooks that were being used for this purpose were directly taken from the British system. The information that was being given to the students led to another totally unexpected result. All the students, including the sons and daughters of Gibbon's Ethiopia, suddenly realized how backward the country's political and social system was. By the time they went through the history of social and political changes that were concluded two centuries previously in Europe and America their eyes were opened to the anachronism of the Ethiopian reality of their day.⁵² In addition, stories of revolutionary changes in America, France and Russia re-enforced the rebelliousness of youth and seemed to legitimate revolutionary action to end anachronism. Smith writes that: "The reverberations of the French Revolution

in the hinterlands of the Habsburg, Ottoman and even Romanov empires, were felt well into the twentieth century.”⁵³ They were definitely felt in the Ethiopia of the 1960s. The political grievances that generated a revolutionary situation in the France of the eighteenth century and later on also shook the foundations of the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires were a daily reality in the Ethiopia of the 1960s. The social groups and structures that were targeted first by the French and later on by the Russian revolutions still existed in the Ethiopia of the time. What was history in Europe was for the Ethiopian students a contemporary reality. Hence, their association with the French and Russian revolutionaries became inescapable. They also drew lessons from the American Revolutionaries’ demand that there be no taxation without representation and from the principle that a government had to be “of, for and by” the people in order to gain legitimacy.

For school children coming from the non-Amhara communities, the history of the nationalist movements that ended the imperial rule of Habsburgs and the Ottomans in Europe started convincing them of the anachronism of imperialism, too. This was followed with events occurring much closer at home and contemporaneously. The independence movement in Africa was giving birth to new countries almost on a monthly basis during the early years of the 1960s. The European powers who started ruling the neighboring peoples at the same time that Ethiopian administration was extended over the home areas of some of these students were departing one after the other. Self-determination and decolonization started getting into the vocabulary of these kinds of youngsters. Going from this stage to determining that these principles are in fact applicable to their peoples required only a little amount of imagination. On the other hand, the fear that such a demand would be raised by the subject communities intensified the authorities’ determination to portray the country as an ancient cohesive nation-state. The mood of the oppressed peoples continued to evolve in one direction and that of the rulers in the diametrically opposite direction.

CONCLUSION

The roots of Ethiopia's problems lay in the manner of her formation as a contemporary state. The present entity came into existence when Gibbon's Ethiopians conquered and started ruling over the age-old enemies of their religion. The Imperial Ethiopian Government of Emperor Haile Selassie became the first Ethiopian regime that tried to portray the resulting empire as a continuation of the ancient Christian kingdom. In the process, all the cultural, historical, and religious attributes of the Christian entity were transferred to the new state. Ethiopia's growing integration into the modern world intensified the need to portray the state as a cohesive entity despite the division of its population into two antagonistic camps with opposing patriotisms. The existence of pre-modern social sectors, such as slaves and *gebbars*, also complicated the effort of shaping a single body of citizens from the country's inhabitants, if such a plan existed at all. Harping on the Ethiopian patriotism of a sector of Eritrean population in order to achieve "re-unification" could be entertained only by treating the contemporary Ethiopian state as a continuation of Gibbon's Ethiopia. As a result, the alienation of those communities and religious groups who were always seen as the traditional enemies of Gibbon's Ethiopia was heightened. On the other hand, merger with Eritrea did provide an opportune moment to fashion a more modern legal structure that could have treated all the empire's inhabitants as a single body of citizens. Failure to formulate and enforce such a commonly applicable legal rights and duties meant not only the continued alienation of the conquered societies but even a growing number of Eritreans. The two policies that were pursued to fashion a modern nation state out of the empire seem to be assimilation and modernization through education. The practical implementation of both policies also only heightened the alienation of a growing number of societies and social groups. The projection of the "Ethiopian nation" by transferring to it the culture, language, history and personality of the Amharas culminated even in the alienation of such closely allied peoples as the Tigrinya speakers.

This was further aggravated as a result of a continued centralization of political power in order to be treated just like any other modern state.⁵⁴ In fact, the suppression of the culture, history and language of the non-Amhara peoples only fueled the affected societies' desire to revive and celebrate these attributes of their identities. In every thing they did the managers of the Ethiopian state during the imperial era appeared to lift a stone only to drop it on their toes. Simmering discontent, the discord between words and deeds, as well as that between the projected image of Ethiopia as a glorious state and the reality of backwardness and famine, went off with a bang in the early 1970s sweeping away the imperial government and its hangers-on.

NOTES

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49. See Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia : State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868 - 1992* (Boulder and London : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 156.
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51. Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia : A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 58.
52. Randi Ronning Balsvik correctly observes that "The students became conscious of Western cultural and political values and could contrast them with the social and political reality in their own country." In *Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy* ed. A. Zegeye, and S. Pausewang, (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1994), p. 81.
53. A. D. Smith, *National Identity* (London : Penguin Books, 1991), p. 138.
54. Adhana H. Adhana argues that even the Abyssinian state-nation was rent asunder as a result of growing centralization of power and tight control of the Amhara ruling classes particularly Shawan Amharas. See Adhana Haile Adhana in *Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy*, edited by Abebe Zegeye

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Chapter 8

THE DERGUE'S ALTERNATIVE STATE-MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The upheaval of 1973/74 that swept away the Imperial Ethiopian Government coincided with an on-going global political wave. According to American academician, Samuel Huntington, the current global democratization wave was ushered in by an event that took place in Portugal in the year 1974. A very similar event was also unfolding in Ethiopia in the same year. While Portugal went in one direction, unfortunately, Ethiopia followed a directly opposite course with disastrous consequences. Starting in 1974 Portuguese society succeeded in effecting two fundamental changes simultaneously. Firstly, it managed to extricate itself from a debilitating counter-insurgency war that was being pursued to hang on to the so-called over-seas Portuguese territories. Secondly, and much more importantly, it succeeded in terminating decades of autocratic rule at home. By successfully effecting these changes, Portuguese society made a clean break with its imperial and autocratic past. This happened because Portuguese political leaders either deliberately or instinctively realized the futility of trying to institute democracy at home while maintaining imperial strangle-hold on other societies. The old adage that “a nation that oppresses another cannot be free” seems to have finally dawned on them. The dual mission of democratization at home and decolonization abroad was achieved despite numerous attempts to reverse the

process. And there was also the other equally dangerous tendency to skip to what was then still considered as the most advanced social formation, i.e., communism. In retrospect no one can deny that Portuguese society has become that much more stable and prosperous for dumping over-seas colonial holdings and for instituting democratic changes at home.

The changes that started to unfold in Ethiopia beginning in the early 1970s also faced similar challenges. Instituting democratic changes in general and addressing the specific demand for self-determination were the burning issues of the day when the imperial government came tumbling down. Unfortunately and unlike in Portugal, the forces that rose to power in Ethiopia were not the kind that could bring about the dual changes that Portugal succeeded in implementing. The forces that ascended to power in Ethiopia on the back of the 1973/74 mass upheaval were drawn primarily from the military and the revolutionary intelligentsia. Unfortunately, the mentality of both groups did not bode well for either democracy or the oppressed peoples' demand for some form of self-determination. For, the military officers' professional culture and the "revolutionary" intelligentsia's ideological conviction were combined to shape the emerging state-management strategy. And the resulting strategy put more emphasis on control and centralization than on recognizing and respecting individual liberties as well as the oppressed peoples' right to run their affairs. The consequence was the abuse, in practice, of even those apparently progressive reforms that resulted from the mass uprising that swept away the imperial government. The contradictions that came to the fore during the rule of the Dergue emanated from the inversion of the very ends that these reforms were supposed to serve: (1) ending the antiquated land tenure system, (2) scrapping the theocratic nature of the Ethiopian state, and (3) officially recognizing the national (ethnic) diversity of Ethiopia were three of the most prominent reforms that suffered such a fate. Hereunder, we will briefly touch on the manner by which these welcome steps of reform were, in practice, subverted and made to accomplish the

directly opposite purposes to those that they were supposed to serve.

ENDING THE *GEBBAR* SYSTEM

As was elaborated earlier, the existence of slavery and the *gebbar* system of enslavement in Ethiopia started drawing international criticism in the 1930s. Although slavery was by and large scrapped during the five years of Italian occupation, its *gebbar* variant outlived it by another forty years. The movement that finally did away with the *gebbar* system, at least in principle, had its roots in the rising student activism of the 1960s. The struggle to end tenancy and absentee landlordism was pioneered primarily by educated youngsters coming from the conquered communities of the south. Tenancy in these parts was not only very rampant but also served as the most glaring testimony of the concerned peoples' status as serfs and subjects of the descendants of the conquerors. Children coming from such communities, quite naturally, had more feelings for the affected peoples' legitimate grievances. In addition, their education had exposed them to the historical developments that had much earlier relegated this form of exploitation to the dust bin of history in one contemporary state after another. Although most educated youngsters tended to identify tenancy as a mark of the country's anachronistic social, political and economic system, the children of the conquered communities had more reasons to take direct action to bring it to an end. Hence, the first public demonstration at which the slogan "Land to the Tiller!" was hoisted took place in February 1965¹ mainly as a result of a secret coordination between two Oromo personalities. The Emperor's rubber stamp parliament, whose president was Tesema Negeri, was at the time debating a land reform bill that was tabled mostly under pressure from Western governments and financial institutions like the World Bank. Effecting the kind of changes suggested by these pressure groups and desired by the tenant farmers was opposed by most of the deputies who were mostly absentee landlords themselves. It was to circumvent this opposition that

the Oromo president of the Parliament and his fellow Oromo Chairman of the University Students Union, Baro Tumsa, secretly arranged for the staging of the first ever "Land to the Tiller" demonstration. From that day until the unseating of the imperial government, this slogan was never missing from the almost annual event of student anti-government demonstrations.

The group that hesitantly started to fill the power vacuum created by the unexpected collapse of the imperial regime approached the issue of land reform with a similar hesitation. As one alternative after another was being considered two developments forced the regime's hand to declare the Land Reform Proclamation on March 4, 1975. Firstly, incidents of peasant farmers driving away their landlords and taking possession of the land and other property taken from the original owners under unjust circumstances started to proliferate in many localities of southern Ethiopia. Secondly, there were a number of personalities who planned to launch some of the southern peoples' struggle for democracy and self-determination by first focusing on the legitimate grievances of tenant farmers. Perhaps the most prominent of such personalities was the late Oromo General Tadesse Birru. He, and a number of other aspiring leaders of southern peoples' struggle, started pursuing a course that would have put them at the head of the peoples' spontaneous uprisings. It was mostly to pre-empt such personalities' wish to turn the peasants' spontaneous uprisings into a coordinated national liberation struggle that the Dergue regime ended its dilly-dallying and hastily proclaimed the radical Land Reform Proclamation of 1975.

In principle, the odious *gebbar* system of exploiting the land and labor of southern societies was scrapped as a consequence of this Proclamation. The event was welcomed with an unprecedented popular jubilation across the entire southern part of the Ethiopian entity. The prevalence of an opposite kind of mood in northern Ethiopia, as documented by some news reports of the time,² revealed the continued existence of the "two Ethiopias" that were identified forty years earlier. This very substantial step of socio-economic reform, like so many other factors, tended to pull the

country apart at the conqueror/conquered cleavage. The allegiance of the military officers was put to the test by the existence of such opposing moods in the two parts of the country. Genuinely implementing the changes desired and welcomed mostly in the south threatened to increasingly alienate their northern traditional constituency. In addition, they could stay on such a course only if they were prepared to increasingly turn their backs on the historical foundations of "true" Ethiopian patriotism that they were trained to celebrate and defend. Not surprisingly, the military officers perhaps mostly instinctively fell back on their traditional roots and historical legacy. At the same time, they had to take numerous contradictory steps that eventually denied them the enthusiastic support of either part of the country, a major factor that hastened their downfall in 1991.

The end result of the Land Reform Proclamation is perhaps the most glaring inversion of the aims that the revolutionary change was hoped to serve. In the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary upheaval, the empowerment of the peasants and the improvement of their life styles seemed to be realized. The farmers associations, that spontaneously came into existence or were formed by student activists, started out by enjoying a considerable amount of autonomy from local government institutions. In rare cases, peasants even started treating local government institutions as instruments for the fulfillment of their own ambitions. The top-down structure that was tailored by, and for, the monarchy and its hangers-on was threatened to be turned upside down. The leaders that southern peasants elected into office in the immediate aftermath of the mass upheaval also tended to be individuals having a considerable degree of personal integrity. The genuine empowerment of the southern rural societies thus appeared to become one of the most radical consequences of the revolutionary change.

The competing interests of the peasants and of the new "revolutionary" authorities manifested themselves in the divergent attitudes of the two groups towards the role of the peasant associations. The peasants tended to see their association as a mechanism for entrenching genuine decentralization and the empower-

ment of local communities. The authorities, on the other hand, were bent on turning the unfolding peasant movement into a tool for furthering the centralization of the state; a task that they felt the predecessor regime left unfinished. Clapham identifies such a divergence between the desires of local communities and that of revolutionary regimes: "An initial upsurge of participation, fueled by measures such as land reform, may be useful and perhaps essential in transferring peasant allegiances from their previous local-level attachments to a new attachment to the central government; but to allow this to lead to the creation of an autonomous peasantry controlling their own land would defeat the very purpose of the revolution."³ And instead of promoting the "interests of broad social and economic classes such as the proletariat, peasantry or bourgeoisie, their objective is to establish a centralised state machinery, autonomous of any social class save that of the state employees who run it."⁴ Numerous subsequent developments clearly demonstrate that such a strategy of the Dergue regime prevailed over the peasants' desire to come into a genuine ownership of their land and association. Within a couple of years after the declaration of the Land Reform Proclamation, the peasants completely lost control of their associations. Most of the leaders who were freely elected by the peasants during the earlier period to serve their interests were systematically driven out of office, disgraced and in some cases even liquidated by state agents on one pretext or another.⁵ These were, as often as not, replaced by corrupt individuals who were hand-picked by state functionaries and then "elected" by the peasants. Under the practice that gradually started to evolve, the interaction between such individuals and the ordinary peasants came to increasingly resemble the one that used to prevail between the tenant farmers and members of the landlord class.⁶ In many respects, the new system proved to be even more harsh in its dealings with the peasant farmers than the one that it replaced. The institutional nature of the new system eliminated even those rare occasions when an appeal to the individual landlords' sympathy could help to lighten the obligation of peasants who had fallen on hard times. In the end, the new system

simply came to serve as a transmission belt for government instructions to the peasants and peasant labor and resources to the regime. Thus, an institution that initially appeared to serve the peasants ended up in raising to an unprecedented level the central authorities' ability to monitor and control local communities.

This was accompanied with a similar inversion of the economic consequences of the revolutionary upheaval. Immediately after the unseating of the landlord class, the peasants started to freely enjoy the fruits of their labor to an unprecedented extent. For the first time since the arrival of Ethiopian officials in their localities, southern peasants were able to dispose of their entire produce in a manner that suited them best. Whatever they could not consume they were able to sell at the going market price. This process too was stood on its head with the passage of time. The regime eventually found it necessary not only to fix prices of agricultural commodities but also to determine quotas that peasants should turn over to state grain marketing institutions.⁷ The regime's growing desire to control the movements and activities of peasant farmers eventually culminated in the disastrous plan of herding them into concentration-camp-like villagization sites. The obligation of providing *corvée* labor to the landlord class, one of the key grievances that fueled the peasants' original rebellion was, instead of being scrapped, replaced by numerous services demanded by the state. Along with such rising state intervention in the lives of peasants, the obligation to provide a growing number of conscripts depleted the rural population of able-bodied young men. The end result was growing poverty and the attendant rising hatred of the state and its agents by an increasing proportion of particularly southern rural dwellers.

What was achieved in effect was not ending landlordism but transferring the right previously enjoyed by individual landlords to the state. The state became a vehicle that centrally appropriated the labor and produce of peasants to the descendants of the original landlords, as the new regime's state structures were manned primarily by people of such a background. The poverty of peasant farmers in the process rose to new heights while that of the descen-

dants of the conquerors did not suffer a similar fate. The social groups that were supposed to benefit from the "revolution" ended up becoming its victims while those who were expected to be the losers in effect relatively became the winners. Hence, although the *gebbar* system was gone for good, the birth of an independent peasant farmer was aborted by the new regime's policy of ever rising control and extraction of the peasants' human and material resources. The imperial state's role as the defender of the interests of exploiting classes was replaced by the new regime's undisguised role as the exploiter. By removing all intermediary parasitical social sectors the regime exposed itself as the ultimate predator. The same applied to the other main social sector, the workers. In the process, the regime became the sole responsible agent for the ever worsening economic position of peasant farmers as well as industrial workers.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Ending the theocratic roots of the Ethiopian state was the other radical consequence of the mass upheaval that put an end to imperial rule. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church remained the official state religion even after the conquest that created the present Ethiopian entity had made non-Copts the majority inhabitants of the country. The alienation of the other religious groups from the state and its officials persisted even as the imperial authorities attempted to lend the empire a facade of nationhood. Reconciling being an Ethiopian and at the same time a Muslim was perhaps the biggest dilemma that the imperial authorities faced. The tradition of viewing being a Muslim and at the same time an Ethiopian as a contradiction in terms lived side by side with the imperial authorities' effort of lending the empire a facade of nationhood. A peculiar policy was adopted in order to keep the Ethiopian and Muslim identities separate. This was the official practice of referring to the Muslim majority as "Muslims living in Ethiopia."⁸ Ramadan other Muslim holidays also used to be referred to as "their holiday."

Any effort to end the policy that used to treat the majority inhabitants of the Ethiopian entity as aliens inevitably affected the official status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This came to the surface in a very dramatic manner in the early days of the upheaval that ended imperial rule. Like the rest of the country's suppressed groups, Muslims also used the growing weakening of the imperial government to draw attention to their alienation from the state. They, and some of their Christian supporters, staged a mammoth demonstration on April 20, 1974, demanding equality with Christians and the separation of Church and state.⁹ Like so many other political developments in Ethiopia during the early days of the revolution, this event too tended to pull the country apart. The legitimate demand of the Muslims was immediately countered by another demonstration two days later at which appeals to keep Ethiopia the Christian country that it has been since the fourth century were presented to the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Prime Minister.¹⁰ The two mutually exclusive perceptions of the meaning of being an Ethiopian once again came to the surface in such a dramatic way.

Increasing popular demands to move Ethiopia forward coupled with the ideology that was adopted by those who were rising to power did finally result in officially ending the status of Ethiopian Orthodoxy as the state religion. In addition, a few other measures were taken to start treating Muslims as the equals of Christians. Perhaps the most significant such gesture was the official recognition of Muslim holidays beginning in 1975.¹¹ With this respect also, the positive consequences of the revolution, however, failed to go beyond such mere gestures. For, the groups that stepped into the shoes of the imperial authorities eventually chose to replace the previous state dogma with a new one. For example, the emperor's habit of quoting the holy scriptures to legitimate his actions was simply replaced with a similar reliance on Marxist-Leninist dogma to justify the policies of the new regime. Hence, instead of developing a genuinely secular political culture, the practice of putting pressure on all religious groups and institutions was eventually adopted. Similarly, instead of treating all faiths with

respect, the new regime's half-baked political cadres often pursued the universally offensive habit of denigrating all religions. The opportunity to treat the followers of all religions as full-fledged Ethiopians was lost when being anti-religion was made to serve as the ultimate identifying feature of the "new Ethiopian." As a result, most ordinary individuals remained even more alienated from the Ethiopian state and its officials than was the case under imperial rule. The seed of growing religious fanaticism that is currently sweeping throughout the country was sown during the Dergue regime's anti-religious fervor. As a result, casting the Ethiopian identity in religious terms has come back to haunt the rulers that have replaced the Dergue. What was started as a process to de-link Church and state came to fuel the desire by a sector of the Ethiopian population to revive the Orthodox nature of the Ethiopian state.

THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF ETHIOPIA'S NATIONAL DIVERSITY

The third apparently radical policy declaration of the Dergue, i.e., officially recognizing Ethiopia's ethnic diversity, also had its roots in the debates that surfaced among student radicals in the 1960s. Starting in the mid-1960s, students kept up the pressure to realize the slogan of "land to the tiller!" (as touched upon above). Before the decade of the 1960s came to an end, the students added another sensitive issue to their growing list of political demands. This issue was then widely known as the "National Question" and had to do mostly with the status of non-Amharic nations inhabiting the Ethiopian entity. The phrase "national question" along with the strategy that was hoped to settle it was borrowed from Russian Marxists of the early part of the twentieth century. The central content of this strategy was practically subordinating the concerned peoples' acknowledged entitlement to self-determination to the global agenda of overthrowing capitalism and imperialism. Resolving class contradictions by carrying out a Socialist Revolution, was presumed to have the side effect of ending

national inequalities as well. It was this strategy that postponed the final disintegration of the Russian Empire by more than seven decades. When Ethiopian student radicals started debating the adoption of this policy for their country, it seemed to permanently hold the USSR together. Hence, the apparent success of Russian Marxists to carry out Socialist Revolution in a backward empire, without in the process triggering its disintegration, appealed to those Ethiopian intellectuals who saw themselves as the more capable heirs to the Ethiopian state.

Struggles for self-determination were then going on in many southern localities in addition to the escalating struggle of the Eritreans. By the late 1960s and early 1970s competing groups of Ethiopian students were also actively preparing the ground to launch their respective Marxist-Leninist parties. The two most prominent Marxist-Leninist parties, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (known more widely by its Amharic acronym, MAESON), resulted from this process. Both parties, at least in principle, recognized "the right of nations or nationalities to self-determination" in their respective manifestos.¹² Including such a provision in their manifestos was evidently felt necessary primarily to allow both parties to harness the struggles for self-determination that were then cropping up in various corners of the empire. They seemed convinced that appearing to champion the cause of oppressed nations was much more prudent than the imperial government's tendency to clash head on with the growing tide of national liberation struggles. The ultimate objective was to subordinate these movements to "class struggle," which could be led by one of them and only one of them. Removing class oppression was presumed to make granting some sort of self-determination to the various nations "unproblematic."¹³ It was assumed that such a scheme would enable them to carry out what the Leninists did in the Russian empire and thus fashion an ultra-modern state out of the anachronistic empire that they were inheriting. The contest to become the sole leader of the 'proletarian revolution' eventually embroiled these two parties in a life and

death struggle. In addition, they were divided on how to handle the military officers that had stepped into the power vacuum created by the sudden collapse of the imperial government. The EPRP adopted a policy of direct confrontation with the military junta.¹⁴ The MAESON, on the other hand, chose to work with the junta as the first of a series of steps that it felt would eventually enable it to conquer power.¹⁵ The contest to emerge as the sole revolutionary party and their divergent attitudes towards the military authorities triggered a war between the two parties that claimed the lives of thousands.

It was their association with MAESON that paved the way for the military officers to increasingly use Marxist-Leninist terms and concepts in defining their policies. Adopting apparently Leninist tactics to resolve the numerous issues that they faced also emanated from this association. Appropriating to themselves the exclusive role of leading any popular movement, with a view to contain it and to invert its objectives, was gained from the lessons they learned from their civilian leftist supporters. Perhaps one of the Dergue's most insincere declarations, the National Revolution Programme of Ethiopia, typifies such a disingenuous championing of a cause with the ultimate aim of foiling a meaningful realization of its objectives. Despite the insincere manner in which it was proclaimed and then forgotten, this declaration was the first official policy that recognized Ethiopia's national diversity. The message that this declaration was expected to convey was the regime's willingness to recognize the "right to self-determination of all nationalities," as can be seen from the following:

The right to self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism. The unity of Ethiopia's nationalities will be based on their common struggle against feudalism, imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and all reactionary forces. This united struggle is

based on the desire to construct a new life and a new society based on equality, brotherhood and mutual respect...

Given Ethiopia's existing situation, the problem of nationalities can be resolved if each nationality is accorded full right to self-government. This means that each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic and social life, use its own language and elect its own leaders and administrators to head its internal organs.¹⁶

Hence, in principle, recognizing Ethiopia as the common country of its component national (ethnic) groups was espoused by this declaration. It also meant a willingness by the new regime to abandon the imperial government's contradictory policy of fashioning a monocultural nation through a process of coercive assimilation. The languages, cultures and religions of all nationalities were declared equal. Hence, the official policy of equating the "national culture and language" with that of the Amharas, that Clapham so correctly identified, seemed to end. Declaring the languages, cultures and identities of other peoples as "tribal" and accusing those who tried to promote them of practicing "tribalism" also was hoped to come to an end. It is possible that the practical implementation of some aspects of this Programme would have taken the steam out of a number of growing national liberation movements.

The Dergue regime was not only not interested in honoring any aspects of its own Program but was even opposed to those who tried to put them into practice. An effort by a group of Oromos that succeeded in launching a newspaper in the Oromo language, for example, was systematically frustrated. The regime took over the operation and gradually drove the paper into the ground. Oromo youngsters who tried to stage cultural events were either hounded out of the country or suffered worse consequences. An attempt by a group of Afar activists to convene an Afar Congress

as a prelude to forming an Afar regional administration was shelved for many years.¹⁷ A new term, "narrow-nationalist," came to replace the previous word "tribalist" for purposes of criminalizing any one trying to promote the cultures and languages of non-Amharic peoples.

On the other hand, the imperial regime's agenda of synthesizing a monocultural Ethiopia was revived and implemented with an unprecedented urgency. The Dergue regime used every possible opportunity to eliminate the cultures and languages of all non-Amharic peoples. A coercive literacy campaign was launched basically with the intention of suddenly increasing the number of Amharic speakers. Ironically, even humanitarian disasters afforded the regime a unique opportunity to step up its agenda of creating an Amharic-speaking Ethiopian nation over night. Hundreds of thousands of northern famine victims were settled primarily among Oromos with the intention of permanently diversifying particularly the demographic make-up of Oromia. As a result of the numerous forms of suffering that they went through during the process of being moved south, most of these northern settlers carried a permanent grudge against the regime. Those who remained behind also had a growing array of reasons to increasingly hate the regime. An attempt to favor the settlers also offended the communities among whom the northern settlers were relocated.

Instituting a modicum of self-government, as espoused by the Program, proved even more unthinkable. It ran against the grain of the military's professional inclination as well as the ideology that it had adopted. Hence, instead of implementing the devolution of power entertained by the Program, the regime inexorably moved in the direction of increasing centralization of power. In the meantime, the struggles for self-determination by the various nations continued to gather momentum. The northern liberation fronts, the EPLF and TPLF, were going from strength to strength with each passing year. The main southern liberation front, the OLF, was also gradually overcoming the peculiar regional and internal difficulties that hampered its speedy growth. By the late 1980s, the combined effect of these fronts started to pose a con-

siderable danger to the regime's survival. It was at this stage that the Dergue took the meaningless step of offering a totally empty regional autonomy to a number of regions. If its intention was to defuse the military pressure being mounted by the Tigreans and the Eritreans, then it totally miscalculated.¹⁸ It was a clear case of offering "too little, too late" for groups that were putting the final touches to their preparation of militarily ending the regime's rule. On the other hand, such a gesture was with-held from those societies where it could have had some impact. Had this gesture been made to the Oromos, for example, it could perhaps have gone beyond stemming the OLF's growing popularity to even revive the kind of support that the regime undeniably enjoyed in the south in the immediate aftermath of the Land Reform Proclamation. A similar gesture to other southern peoples also could have contributed to a postponement of its sudden demise. Offering the right of autonomy to those who were bound to spurn it while denying it to those who could have seen it as a step in the right direction only offended a considerable proportion of the latter group. It clearly demonstrated to them that even minimal concessions can be gained only under military pressure.

Incidentally, the only Dergue-created structure that tried to survive after the regime's defeat seems to be the weak Afar regional administration. The Afar regional administration was created as part of the regional autonomy scheme that was drawn up to undercut the other liberation fronts. It was a return to an idea that was initially floated by Afar activists in the early days of the revolution that ended imperial rule. Despite the considerable lapse between the time when it was initially tabled and its eventual implementation, it seemed to have been welcomed by a significant proportion of the Afars. Maintaining this autonomy and heading off yet another division of the Afars by the Ethio-Eritrean borders, seemed to have motivated an ongoing Afar movement.

CONCLUSION

The Dergue regime developed the habit of indicating a move in one direction while actually going the opposite way. It saw itself as the champion of workers' and peasants' rights while in practice presiding over a process that raised the impoverishment of both social sectors to unprecedented heights. It drew up programs for devolution of power while in fact charting a course of escalating centralization. It proclaimed an inclusive Ethiopian state but fell back on the imperial regime's habit of equating Ethiopian identity, history and culture with that of northern Ethiopia. It made the simple assumption that the end of the imperial government spelled the end of the empire as well. Hence, it did not find it necessary to go beyond just overthrowing the imperial regime to fashion a new state structure which could at least appear to reflect and promote the identities and interests of all the component communities. As a result, all those who felt excluded and underprivileged ended up viewing the regime "essentially as an expression, however disguised, of aggressive Amhara nationalism."¹⁹ The perception of the regime as an embodiment of aggressive Amhara nationalism became pervasive even among the Tigrinya speakers of northern Ethiopia. The forces who were harnessing these peoples' growing alienation from the Ethiopian state started to witness the regime's rising political and military bankruptcy. This situation, coupled with the total absence of an alternative "Ethiopian" opposition force, afforded them a unique opportunity of envisioning a new order dominated by them. Their ambition to decolonize a part of the empire and to reconfigure and control the remainder became increasingly feasible. They continued to fine tune their evolving vision as they stepped up their military pressure on the regime. Instead of countering their evolving vision with a more plausible one, the regime simply continued to repeat ad nauseum its slogan of "Revolutionary Motherland or Death!" In the end, this slogan failed to move even the regime's military officers. For, as it continued to lose increasing portions of its "traditional" homeland its appeal to "traditional Ethiopian patrio-

tism" sounded out of place. On the other hand, it found itself situated among alien peoples that it could not trust, relate to nor respect. Its attempt to mobilize support from these parts by referring to the "fruits of the revolution" also fell on deaf ears because all the positive outcomes of the revolution had already been inverted much earlier. Hence, its end became faster than most people expected mainly because it could not mobilize the support of any social sector nor regional grouping.

NOTES

1. Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia : A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 456.
2. Keesing's Contemporary Archives March 24 - 30, 1975 No. 27029/30.
3. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 6.
4. Ibid. p. 6.
5. Ibid. p. 158-159.
6. Ibid. p. 159.
7. Ibid. p. 169.
8. Teshale Tibebe, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896 - 1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ : Red Sea Press, 1995), p. 49.
9. Keesing's Contemporary Archives p. 26638.
10. Keesing's Contemporary Archives p. 26638.
11. Keesing's Contemporary Archives No. 27029.
12. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 198.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p. 54.
15. Ibid. p. 53.
16. Ibid. p. 199.
17. Ibid. p. 200.

18. Mengistu reportedly asked an Oromo elder why these northern fronts were spurning his various offers to which the old man replied “while you are offering them the hand of your daughter, they are set on inheriting your wife”. Adam Jilo.
19. I. M. Lewis, ed. *Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London : Ithaca Press, 1983), p. 8.

Chapter 9

THE TPLF'S EVEN MORE CONTRADICTIONARY STATE-MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

By the time the Dergue regime was overthrown in May of 1991, the democratization and decolonization ripples that started in Portugal seventeen years earlier had risen to tidal wave proportions. As popular uprisings in one country after another succeeded in sweeping away authoritarian systems of government, observers started talking of a new global wave of democratization. Since it seemed to fit into this global political current, Ethiopia's second hope to genuinely realize both decolonization and democratization appeared much more promising than at any previous historical juncture. The steps taken immediately after the Dergue's overthrow indeed seemed to lend credence to such an expectation. The deliberations of the July 1991 Conference indicated a willingness to once and for all settle both the questions of decolonization and democratization.

Despite an internal acrimonious relation that often pitted them against each other, all Eritrean political groups were united in considering the end of "Ethiopian colonialism" as the objective of their struggles. The resolution of this issue in a manner determined by the Eritreans became inevitable when the EPLF succeeded to militarily take control of the entire Eritrean territory. Hence, what the EPLF leaders wanted from the July 1991 Con-

ference was not an approval of this reality but its acceptance as the inevitable consequence of their military victory. All those who continue to blame the Conference's participants and world powers for Eritrea's separation, do so only by overlooking this indisputable historical fact. Laying the foundations of a new and hopefully a more friendly relation between the peoples of the new state and the remainder of Ethiopia was the most important consideration that resulted in the acceptance of the inevitable consequence of Eritrean military victory. No person or group of persons who have the best interests of the two peoples at heart could blame the Conference's participants for basing their decision on such a consideration.

The logic for supporting the formalization of Eritrean independence through a referendum rested primarily on the indisputable fact of Eritrean military victory. On the other hand, the theoretical bases for restricting the relevance of Ethiopian colonialism to Eritrea have always been problematic, and remained so to the very end. This surfaced during the July Conference's deliberation on the plan to formalize Eritrea's independence through a referendum. A delegate of one of the Gurage political organizations challenged the historical arguments presented by Eritrean leaders to restrict the status of being an Ethiopian colony to their country. He argued that the relation of many other societies with the Ethiopian state resembles that of a colony much more than Eritrea's. Eritrean response to his line of argument failed to sway most of the delegates to the Conference. It was only by redirecting the discussion to the reality of Eritrea's military victory that supporting the formalization of Eritrean independence through a referendum was made possible.

Accepting Eritrea's hard won right to independence thus became just one aspect of resolving the problems emanating from the imperial nature of the Ethiopian state. In many respects, the status of being the colonial subjects of the Ethiopian state applied much more to southern peoples than to Eritreans. Contrary to the manner that led to Eritrea's merger with Ethiopia, no sector of the southern peoples was ever given the opportunity to deliberate

whether to be drawn into or remain within the Ethiopian state. A devastating war of conquest was the only factor that brought them into the country now known as Ethiopia. Force has remained the only factor that is keeping them within Ethiopia. They remained alienated from the Ethiopian state, its officials and its official culture, language and identity. It would have thus been ironic to support Eritrea's independence without taking some measures towards ending this alienation. TPLF's position as the host of the Conference would have proved even more ironic without some how appearing to address this issue. If the Amharas could cite historical, religious and ethnic affinity to justify merger with at least a part of Eritrean society, the Tigreans had even more reasons. As is well known, other than the brief period of European rule, there is absolutely no difference between the Tigrinya speakers of Eritrea and their kins living south of the Mereb river. Any decision that made members of these two communities foreigners to each other while turning other very different peoples like the Oromo, Somali, Walayitas, Anuaks as fellow nationals of Tigreans was bound to be very strange. In addition, struggles for self-determination by most of these peoples was gathering momentum at the time the Dergue regime was overthrown. Recasting the Ethiopian state on totally new basis was thus hoped to lend a sufficiently plausible rationale for maintaining the remainder of Ethiopia as a new entity.

Reconfiguring Ethiopia as a new federal state joining together free communities hence came to be adopted ostensibly as a response to outstanding demands for self-determination. The kernel of this concept was enshrined in the Charter and was later on integrated in the TPLF Constitution of 1994. The inclusion of the right to secession in both documents was based on the expectation that remaining within a bigger entity will be demonstrably more beneficial to all concerned communities than the creation of separate states. In addition, it meant that communities will remain within the Ethiopian entity purely out of a free choice and because they can see the practical advantages of doing so. Seen in this way, the adoption of federalism was bound to result in the scrap-

ping of subordination of some communities by the elite coming from a particular nation; the central feature of Ethiopia's political life ever since she was formed in the present manner. A new free federal Ethiopia was to be built on the grave of the empire.

In practice, however, the TPLF pursued a policy of founding its domination on the abuse of both federalism and self-determination. And the contradictions that have cropped up under TPLF rule are embedded in the front's determination to practically turn these otherwise laudable principles into the foundation of its domination. The political thinking that came to influence this abuse has its roots in the debate that surfaced among student radicals during the 1960s. As we have touched upon above, Ethiopian student radicals were by and large seduced by Lenin's strategy to reconfigure a backward empire to create an ultramodern state. The major empire-wide self-styled Marxist-Leninist parties, i.e., MAESON and EPRP, each felt that it had the exclusive right to implement Lenin's formula in Ethiopia. As has already been referred to above, the core of this strategy was subordinating all other political demands to class struggle. At the time these supposedly country-wide parties were espousing this line of thinking, the TPLF adamantly rejected such a subordination of national liberation struggle to class struggle. By doing so, it succeeded to fend off these parties' encroachment into Tigrean society as well as in foiling their intentions to subordinate the TPLF itself.

By the latter half of the 1980s, however, growing TPLF military strength had made the replacement of Amhara domination by that of Tigreans much more feasible. It was mainly to lay the ideological and structural bases for the realization of this ambition that the TPLF returned to the agenda of emerging as the only authentic Marxist-Leninist party. This plan surfaced when the TPLF formed the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, MLLT, ostensibly to give the TPLF and Tigrean society a proletarian leadership. The plan to implant similar groups within TPLF's surrogate groups also appeared unavoidable. The whole structure was expected to be woven into a tight network under the command of the top TPLF leaders. How this kind of structure serves

the interests of a narrow circle of leaders has been elaborated in details in another section.

This ever narrowing circle of control constitutes the core Leninist system of party work. It is the establishment of such a system of party operation that enabled Lenin to articulate an apparently contradictory resolution of national question. Lenin strongly defended the right of nations to self-determination upto and including secession. At the time that he was propounding this principle he was convinced of the imminence of global socialist revolution. Writing in early 1916, he anticipated that the revolution would break out within five or ten years.¹ And he visualized the aim of this revolution to be "not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small states and all national isolation; not only to bring the nations closer to each other, but also to *merge them*"² (emphasis added). Recognizing the right of self-determination was considered a transitional phase in the process that was expected to culminate in the eventual merger of humanity. "Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of liberation of all oppressed nations, i.e. their freedom to secede."³ The road to a successful merger of humankind was expected to be paved by merging "the class struggle of the workers in the oppressing nations with the class struggle of the workers in the oppressed nations."⁴ The class struggles of the workers coming from the two kinds of nations could be merged only if it is guided by a central organ.

As is well known, the Leninist style of party and state management did postpone the distintegration of the Czarist empire by about seventy years. At the first incident of a significant weakening of central control, the various Republics of the USSR chose to depart from the federation. The expectation that class solidarity would overshadow national particularism did not bear out in reality. Neither did the expectation that humankind would develop in the direction of increasing voluntary merger. The fact that the Republics departed without much hesitation serves as a proof

that discontent continued to simmer for the seventy years coming out in the open in the early 1990s.

When the TPLF started adopting the same system to serve as the foundation of its domination, the Leninist formula for party and state management had already entered a very serious stage of bankruptcy. Hence, as the Cold War drew to a close, the TPLF found it increasingly necessary to put on the image of a born again liberal democrat. Unfortunately, the signals from the Western governments and especially from the US Government encouraged the TPLF to forget about democracy and to dominate the country. This has been elaborated in another section. Under the circumstances, the TPLF has become the only force that is running a Leninist system of party and state management with the approval and active support of the US and other western governments. The contradictions that have replaced instead of erasing previous ones emanate from the adoption of this system.

The core of the contradiction embedded in TPLF rule rests in the contradictory nature of the EPRDF. The EPRDF is made to appear as a coalition of political groups supposedly representing the interests of Tigreans, Amharas, Oromos, the Southern Peoples and other smaller communal entities. Of all of these groups only the TPLF was created by Tigrean nationalists in order to further the interests of their national constituency. That the rest are a creation of Tigrean nationalists in order to project their political control beyond the borders of Tigray is not in doubt. With the passage of time, this mission of TPLF's surrogate organizations has become increasingly indisputable. As a result, no one can now seriously take the EPRDF as a coalition of equal political groups. The TPLF has been, and will continue to stick to being, the first among "equals." In order for this state of affairs to continue, any attempt to introduce genuine democracy into even the EPRDF has to be resisted by TPLF leaders. The strong TPLF resistance to democratic practice within the country emanates from its denial of basic democratic rights to its own partners.

Similarly, the same constraints make it impossible for TPLF's so-called partners to engage other autonomous groups in a fair

and free election. After relinquishing their own rights within the EPRDF they are put in a position to serve as a vehicle that denies members of their community basic democratic rights. Thus instead of becoming the embodiment of their community's voice in the federal government they are turned into an instrument that silences it. One of the biggest ironies of this setup is the death of the good Galla (Oromo). Emperor Minilik, who presided over the creation of the Ethiopian empire in its present form, divided Oromos into good and bad. He considered all those who submitted to his authority and became instruments for the conquest of their communities as the good ones. Under the TPLF, even those who have chosen to pursue such a policy are not exempted from castigation. Of all the components of the EPRDF it is the members of the OPDO who are subjected to most humiliating kind of ridicule. They are routinely held up as inept, corrupt and responsible for human rights violations. This is a case of blaming the axe or the chain saw for deforestation, and not the hand that operates them. Members of TPLF surrogate organizations were designed and unleashed to suppress their own people. It is in discharging this duty that they commit human rights violations and not necessarily for some pathological reasons.

Those who accuse the TPLF of introducing the ethnic factor into Ethiopia's politics are disingenuous in the extreme. As we have elaborated above, the role of ethnicity in Ethiopia's politics has been growing starting from the era of Emperor Haile Sillasie's rule. The various groups that aspired to replace his system of government with a revolutionary one went one stage further in acknowledging the role of national question in the country's politics. The Dergue regime, did entertain the recognition of the right of self-determination during the early years of its rise to power. Its refusal to make a genuine devolution of power to make even self-government possible ended up in fueling the struggles for self-determination. The TPLF simply went one stage further in the implementation of this principle. At the same time, it has copied the Dergue's attitude of inverting the genuine exercise of the rights that have been recognized on paper.

The TPLF lacks the demographic basis that could enable it to allow a genuine self-government of all non-Tigrean societies. Allowing a fair representation even within the EPRDF automatically threatens the supremacy of TPLF leaders. Hence, TPLF leaders have let out of confinement a monster, ethnic nationalism, with which they cannot live. Only by maintaining vigilance against any attempt at the emergence of an acceptable voice for all non-Tigreans can they hope to hold on to their supreme position. This vigilance starts within the EPRDF structures and extends to the public domain. Within the EPRDF they have to continue to cull any person with potentials of becoming a rallying point for his/her society. They have to resort to all sorts of pretexts to continuously cull these kinds of persons. The end result is that the EPRDF will never become the genuine representative of the peoples that it purportedly represents so long as this situation prevails. TPLF leaders, hence, will not be seen as the representatives of all the participants of the EPRDF leave alone of Ethiopian society at large. It is possible that Meles will continue to be viewed as a Tigrean leader than the leader of all Ethiopian peoples even within the EPRDF. With all their shortcomings, the rise to power of the personalities that were ruling Ethiopia prior to the TPLF did draw some level of support from non-Amhara communities. The absence of a similar sentiment outside Tigrean society is one of the most glaring ironies of Tigrean domination.

Supposedly the equality of all the peoples of Ethiopia has become an official state policy under the TPLF. But in reality, members of non-Tigrean societies do not see this equality in practice. Tigreans living in the homelands of other peoples have an undisguised privilege over the local inhabitants. TPLF operatives have the ultimate say in all matters of administration. This continuously exposes the supposedly elected representatives of such communities to a daily ordeal of humiliation. They are caught between the mission of appearing as spokespersons of their communities and implementors of Tigrean agenda of supremacy. If they turn one way they step on the rights of their community and if they pursue another path they run the risk of countering TPLF agenda

of domination. The daily pressure that they find themselves under makes it impossible for them but to choose bidding the will of their mentors.

The TPLF has revived and polished an older political practice to legitimate this situation. The previous regimes criminalized members of non-Amhara communities by labeling them either as “tribalists” or “narrow nationalists.” Now the TPLF has revived the habit of accusing members of southern peoples of practicing narrow nationalism. At the same time, any person speaking up for Amhara rights is castigated as being chauvinist. Only Tigreans are exempted from the two kinds of accusations. Hence, although the structures that ostensibly allow representation of all Ethiopian peoples has been legalized, this style of foiling genuine representation has erased its effectiveness. Although all peoples now remain within the Ethiopian state supposedly out of choice, only Tigreans have become the sole beneficiary of its economy and power distribution. The suppression of basic democratic liberties and the absence of the rule of law have made Ethiopian federalism a farce. And the major incentive, US-led international community’s encouragement, for the ruling group to revise this practice is completely missing. On the contrary, the US Government in particular has taken the pains of signaling to the ruling group that it is on the right path, as we documented in the last section.

And this is the millstone that is drawing Ethiopian federalism to the abyss. Ironically, the signals given to the ruling group by the US administration is contrary to the values espoused by the pioneers of American federalism. The architects of federalism in the USA considered the promotion of “the common good” as its main legitimating factor.⁵ A commentator who assessed the success of this principle almost one and a half centuries later concluded that “On the whole the welfare of each made for the welfare of all.”⁶ Contrary to this situation, the TPLF seems to be saying to all non-Tigrean communities “What is mine is mine, and what is yours is also mine!” The promotion of the common good is completely missing. A situation in which the welfare of the Tigrean people,

particularly of individual Tigreans residing among other peoples, could be promoted only at the expense of that of the rest of the peoples has been created.

CONCLUSION

As the imaging and administering Ethiopia evolved throughout the last decades, some problems were resolved while others were created. Outright slavery ended in the mid-1930s. Its closely related phenomenon of *gebbar* also was scrapped some forty years later. The ethnic diversity of the Ethiopian state started gaining tacit recognition first under Emperor Haile Selassie. His successors went one stage further by declaring the equality of all the ethnic groups. In all these apparent moves in the right direction, steps were taken to abuse, confuse and avert any genuine change. The present formal adoption of federalism, to give the various peoples of Ethiopia some voice in the administration of their particular and common affairs, fits into this evolving picture. And it constitutes a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, the practice of declaring one thing and doing the direct opposite continues to persist. So, Ethiopia still stands at a cross-roads. If she continues on the path desired by the present rulers and their foreign backers, the next form of breakdown of the state may prove even more devastating than the one that accompanied all previous changes of power. Frustration born of seeing but not exercising one's rights is growing pervasive. In addition, the division of political forces now much more overtly coincides with communal partisanship. All Tigreans are now considered as agents and beneficiaries of the present power structure than even the Amharas did in their day. And the TPLF appears bent on implicating Tigrean society in its conflicts within Ethiopia and with the peoples of neighboring states. A similar situation to the one existing in Rwanda and Burundi seems to be in the making. At the same time, the TPLF's divide and rule policy has repeatedly caused unnecessary inter-communal strife, particularly in southern Ethiopia. The

country must be saved from the entrenchment of this kind of people-to-state and people-to-people relations.

There is another path that the development of the country's political process can take. And that is the path that would lead to the cultivation of the spirit of commonly owning and governing the entity. The infrastructure for the realisation of this ideal is already in place. What needs to be done is simple but very difficult. Genuine respect of individual and group interests and views can make this infrastructure much more genuinely operational. In short, democratisation still remains as the country's top political priority if it is to avert a growing slide into interminable conflict. One can conceivably struggle for democracy against a regime not supported by the US-led international community. A struggle for democracy in a situation where the regime is a favorite of the US-led international community, on the other hand, is not very common and thus would prove a truly uphill affair. This is the challenge that is facing the voices for democracy and self-determination.

NOTES

1. V. I. Lenin, *Lenin On the National and Colonial Questions: Three Articles* (Peking : Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p. 15.
2. Ibid. p. 6.
3. Ibid. p. 6.
4. Ibid. p. 12.
5. A. Hamilton, J. Madison, and J. Jay, *The Federalist* in Encyclopaedia Britannica Series (London : William Benton Pub,) p. 30.
6. Theodore Marburg, *League of Nations : Its Principles Examined* . (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1918), p. 22.

Part IV

WHITHER ETHIOPIA?

Chapter 10

ETHIOPIA MUST CHANGE OR PERISH

Twice in as many decades, Ethiopia arrived at historically opportune moments that afforded her the chance to genuinely and conclusively address the inter-locking questions of democratization and decolonization. A move to genuinely address these issues was first made possible when the Emperor's regime was overthrown in 1974. And conclusively resolving these lingering questions seemed to be even more possible and necessary, for the second time, when the Emperor's successors were unseated in 1991. Unfortunately, on both occasions those who rose to power squandered the chance to bring about the necessary changes; as was elaborated in the previous sections of this work. On both occasions, hopes were raised only to be dashed. Promises for radical changes were proposed, to be honored only in the breach. The frequency with which such a repetition of disappointment is recurring has diverse and worrying implications.

Emperor Haile Selassie's reign lasted for almost sixty years. Hence, few of those who witnessed his rise to power were still around when he was overthrown. In contrast, the number of Ethiopians who lived through the last two changes of regime may now be in the majority. Such persons have first hand knowledge of the rhetoric and styles of administration of the three regimes that they have witnessed in their lifetimes. They can easily finger the super-

ficial differences that divide these regimes and their underlying similarities. Even more importantly, such persons do not need to be told of all these regimes' determination to foil the peoples' aspirations to have a say in the running of their particular and common affairs. They witnessed it first hand.

The present regime and the one that it replaced each came to power making many generous promises. The present one, in particular, went one step further and enshrined aspects of these promises into the country's so-called constitution and other legal instruments. The same regime, however, is not only ignoring its proclamations but has gone to the extent of actually violating its own laws. We have thus arrived at an absurd stage in the country's evolution. The peoples are informed that they are entitled to an array of rights while every possible step is taken to curb the exercise of these rights. They are told, "These rights are yours but you will not have them!" In the process, promises made by governments and laws enacted by them have now come to be viewed with a greater degree of skepticism than in the past. The number of peoples who would increasingly lose faith in a "better tomorrow" is likely to rise under such circumstances. And harboring a feeling of hopelessness is the worst thing that can happen to any people. Such a feeling can serve as the breeding ground for all sorts of extremism, frustration, and eventually an extreme form of nihilism. An extreme form of individualism and particularism may come to completely replace the previously widespread tendencies to view the liberation of oneself and one's community within the general agenda of human emancipation. Losing faith in a "better tomorrow" but unwilling to tolerate the ongoing injustice and humiliation, the present and future generations may be forced to adopt destruction as an end in itself. Tragically, such a spirit is already sweeping through large parts of Africa, occasioning not only changes of regime but the total disintegration of entire states and societies as well.

Such a possible degeneration of the country's political mood would herald the total reversal of the spirit that prevailed during the last couple of decades. The generation that overthrew the

Emperor and then continued to resist the regime of his successors was divided into numerous mutually antagonistic camps. However, many members of that generation had one common quality. They were completely selfless in pursuing the political ideals that they embraced. Tens of thousands went to their deaths convinced that their sacrifices would pave the way to a bright and better future for those remaining behind. Even in cases when the political ideals of such persons were the restoration of their particular ethnic community's rights, they saw this within the context of a general agenda of advancing human freedom. In particular, the liberation of one's community was not expected to be realized at the expense of that of others. If the selfless spirit that underpinned this kind of thinking is reversed as a result of the behavior of the present leaders, then it would definitely constitute a most unforgivable mistake. For, it could indefinitely bar the way to any future positive common plan of action.

One of the enduring negative features of northern Ethiopian political tradition is the inability or unwillingness to effect a peaceful transfer of power. Monarchy is known to have been practiced for centuries in these parts of the present Ethiopian state. And it is a political system that provides for one of the clearest and simplest procedures for a smooth and peaceful transfer of power. Yet, it rarely functioned that way in the northern Ethiopian political tradition. A peaceful succession to power was the exception rather than the rule in the history of northern Ethiopia. Since the northern Ethiopian state practice was extended to the rest of the present entity, more over, there has not been a single case of a peaceful genuine transfer of power. *Ras* Tafari, later Haile Selassie, came to power through the process of a palace coup d'état. Tens of thousands of Wallo Oromos fell on the battlefield of Sagale resisting the overthrow of *Lij* Iyasu, the legitimate heir to the Crown. And Haile Selassie had to systematically eliminate or disable all other contenders before confidently donning the Crown.

The Emperor's overthrow was accompanied by an even more widespread and devastating conflict. The number of people killed during the subsequent seventeen years runs into the hundreds of

thousands. Hundreds of thousands also fled the country into exile in neighboring countries and beyond. The social fabric of the peoples who constitute the Ethiopian population suffered considerable disruption and distortion as a result of the Dergue regime's irresponsible social engineering policy. The end of this regime was made possible at a steep cost, both in terms of the loss of human life and destruction of property. So one can easily see how the volume of violence and devastation that routinely accompanied power changes in Ethiopia seems to be escalating at each historical juncture.

In addition, state institutions that were inherited from predecessor regimes had to be completely demolished on each occasion. This became inevitable because of the ruling groups' habit of fusing themselves with state institutions, civic, religious, and professional bodies. This was particularly the case under the Dergue regime. The Ethiopian armed and police forces, the judicial institutions, labor unions and professional associations, etc. were made to merge with the ruling so-called Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE). The incoming regime thus had no alternative but to start from scratch when reconstituting a new state structure. That was understandable. But the present regime's determination to repeat the same policy that made this necessary is as totally inexplicable as it is inexcusable.

The TPLF regime is repeating its predecessor's practice of staffing the country's bureaucracy strictly with its henchmen. In addition, only those civic, labor, and professional bodies that are commanded by the members or subalterns of the ruling EPRDF are tolerated. The judicial system is once again being politicized or is practically subordinated to the ruling party's political operatives. Under the TPLF, even more dangerous new precedents are being added to the continuation of the previous regimes' practice of blurring the separation between partisan and public affairs and institutions. The economy is being fused with the ruling party in a much more partisan and obvious manner. TPLF-owned corporations are increasingly taking control of the commanding heights of the country's economy. The speedy development of Tigray region

and the wealth of individual Tigreans is perceived to be achieved at the expense of other regions and members of other communities. At the same time, each Tigrean living among other peoples is being viewed as a conscious participant in TPLF's policy of monitoring and suppressing the movements of the rest of the peoples. The sum total of all of these developments is the creation of a situation in which the TPLF is implicating the entire Tigrean society in the conflicts that exist between it and members of other communal groups. The future implication of this development is quite obvious and indeed very worrying. Conflict is increasingly taking on a more overtly communal nature. The regime's divide-and-rule strategy is bound to further exacerbate this already worrisome trend.

The TPLF is also practically demonstrating that the path to individual and group wealth is through taking political power and exploiting it in a glaringly partisan manner. TPLF leaders seem to declare: "Seek ye first the kingdom of political power and all the rest will be added unto you!" The signal that this gives to members of other groups is unmistakably clear: "Do as we have done, or else reconcile yourselves to remaining poor and humiliated!" We should not be surprised, then, if some groups start entertaining ousting the TPLF by any means possible as the only way to get their turn to enrich themselves and their followers. Still others would increasingly view exiting from a state system that is based on the abuse of their resources and the humiliation of their peoples as the only honorable and feasible option. Each scenario is fraught with many dangers.

TPLF leaders appear confident that they can indefinitely maintain the present order. Has not Tigrean society proven that it is the bravest? Is Tigrean society not the most armed and militarily trained community in Ethiopia? Is the TPLF not the most organized force in the region? Are its leaders not the most sophisticated and articulate group of people in the country? Has this not been acknowledged by the world powers? Has the TPLF not defeated the superior forces of the EDU and EPRP while it was still in its infancy? Did it not go on to cow Black Africa's largest

and best-equipped armed force? Has it not succeeded in subduing the larger and apparently more sophisticated Amhara elite? Has it not contained resistance by the country's largest ethnic group, the Oromos? In addition, TPLF members see themselves as the most determined and hard-working collection of people. Hence, each TPLF member and individual Tigrean is confident of vigilantly staying on guard to permanently safeguard the present regime from all kinds of subversion. And when they look around, they fail to see any force that poses any danger to their authority for the foreseeable future. Hence, their bright future appears indefinitely stretched out in front of them.

The study of human history, however, indicates one indisputable fact. No political system has ever succeeded in identifying all avenues to human freedom and permanently barring them. The naked suppression of liberties has often resulted only in locating the power holders and those aspiring for freedom on two mutually impermeable planes. The more a system drives opposition underground, the more ignorant of unfolding trends that system becomes. As a result, the ever-present pressure for increasing human freedom has repeatedly come from unexpected corners in the least expected manners to the surprise of such power holders. Thus, we have witnessed in our lifetimes the sudden and totally inexplicable unravelling of apparently impregnable authoritarian systems. What will happen in Ethiopia the next time such a scenario makes itself felt? Some of us believe that the country may not survive another round of tumultuous change of power accompanied by another experience of bloodletting. That is why I believe that Ethiopia has to change—failing which, it could quite likely perish.

The fragility inherent in the present Ethiopian power structure is quite obvious for anyone willing to see it. The inborn instability of the present structure emanates from the irony embodied in the ruling coalition, the EPRDF. Within the EPRDF, the smallest of the components that make it up wields more power than the rest put together. That the TPLF speaks on behalf of a smaller social group than the OPDO, ANDM, and the constellation of the other southern PDOs is incontestable. TPLF su-

premacY within the coalition is also indisputable. In short, the fact that the EPRDF power pyramid rests on its narrowest apex is very obvious for anybody who wishes to see it. At present, this unstable power edifice is being propped up by TPLF security and military machinery as well as by the support and endorsement of foreign powers. These factors are clearly inadequate to sustain the stability of the present power structure. Thus, its sudden collapse appears very likely. This should worry all those who are interested in averting another round of tumultuous change in Ethiopia. In the following pages, I will briefly enumerate the contributions of the various actors towards averting such a scenario.

A RECIPE FOR CHANGE

THE TPLF'S PORTION

TPLF leaders have cleverly shifted the blame for the undeniable shortcomings of the country's present political situation onto the opposition groups. The espousal of armed struggle by some opposition groups is often mentioned as one of the main outstanding causes for the absence of tolerance. The forces that are speaking about armed struggle, therefore, are asked to renounce "violence" as a precondition to even engage in dialogue. This, despite the regime's openly stated conviction that its military victory bears testimony to its popularity. This implies that others have to mount a successful armed revolt if they wish to demonstrate their popularity. Yet, the regime is not talking even to those who have never entertained armed struggle. Surprisingly, even civic and professional associations are not spared the regime's intimidation and harassment. This is borne out by the experiences of the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union. These, too, are often asked to "renounce" violence.

In addition, humanitarian and human rights NGOs are denied the rights guaranteed to them by the regime's own laws. The regime's refusal to register the Human Rights League and to respect the decision of its own courts in favor of the Oromo Relief Association are clear cases of this absurd form of state practice.

How can overtly political groups develop confidence in the system when even the survival of such non-political groups continues to come under threat? One could go on and list numerous other disingenuous tactics of the regime to hold opposition groups solely responsible for its own obstructionist political practices.

If change is to come in a relatively peaceful way and be made to take a more constructive direction, the TPLF also has to make some very important changes. A change of attitude would perhaps be the most important such change. TPLF leaders appear to challenge their opponents to reap success only by repeating their own style of conquering power. Meles, during a meeting with American academicians specializing on Ethiopian affairs, made this very clear. Explaining why TPLF troops were easily able to contain OLF armed activities, he identified the lack of support by Oromo peasants for the OLF as the key factor. And he went on to contrast it with the experience of his front in Tigray. Thus, stepping-up armed struggle is seen as the only way to demonstrate that a group does indeed have the backing of its society. Equating military success with political popularity is deeply ingrained in the minds of TPLF leaders, as elaborated in a previous section. So long as these leaders stick to this position, it is futile to talk about peaceful political work or fair and free competitive elections. They have to change this attitude. They must be encouraged to change.

The second important change that the TPLF has to institute, to pave the way for peaceful political work, concerns the status of its so-called allies in the EPRDF. The period when the EPRDF was looked at, by some people, as a genuine coalition of quasi-autonomous groups is over. Its bogus nature is now almost unanimously and openly acknowledged, even by TPLF supporters. The hopelessness of the expectation that members of the surrogate groups will succeed in winning the hearts and minds of their respective ethnic constituencies is no more in doubt. The causes for this failure, however, are rarely correctly identified.

It is a rare political group that succeeds in shedding its birthmarks. The groups created by the TPLF, in particular, are

stamped by the circumstances under which they came into being. The persons who were used in forming these groups were first stripped of their volition when they were abducted from their localities and thrown into a war that they neither understood nor believed in. Their self-esteem suffered additional damage when they were captured and held in TPLF POW detention centers under appalling conditions. This background will always influence their psychology when dealing with TPLF officials or even ordinary TPLF members. And it is possible that the behavior of the TPLF operatives who are assigned to supervise these individuals continuously reminds them of this indelible past experience. Just as they had to submit in order to survive then, so will they continue to do until they are afforded a more relaxed atmosphere.

Ironically, these same humiliated individuals are expected to serve as the symbols of their communities' empowerment and sense of dignity. How can they? The end result is obvious. The communities to which these individuals are assigned by the TPLF have concluded that they are being treated as captives of former captives. The concerned individuals' attempt to masquerade as the spokespersons of their communities has hence totally failed to disguise the reality of Tigrean domination. In the process, federalism and the right to self-determination that it was supposed to symbolise are universally seen as being a sham. This has put demands for democracy and self-determination at the center of the country's politics even more prominently than in the past. How the remainder of the road to the genuine exercise of these rights would be covered will depend on how the internal EPRDF atmosphere evolves.

One can speculate on a couple of scenarios. For example, if the TPLF's strict control is relaxed, it is possible that a few of even these former captives will start shedding their psychological scars and start asserting themselves. No one relishes being humiliated and rejected by one's own people and one's bosses at the same time. On the contrary, no one would pass up the chance of being honored as the champion of the cause of his/her kith and kin. In

addition, if it is demonstrated that the internal EPRDF space is accommodative enough, other more capable and committed individuals will increasingly be drawn to join TPLF's surrogate parties. An EPRDF that practices democracy internally will become much more confident to engage in democratic competition as a possible alternative to the present reality of clinging to power by sheer force.

Whether to bring about such an internal reform is, admittedly, the preserve of EPRDF leaders. The changes needed to shift the nature of political contest to the arena of peaceful political competition, however, is the concern of all those who wish to avert the continuation of interminable armed conflict. The two processes are, however, intimately intertwined. Changes in the public arena will definitely impact on internal EPRDF political practice and vice versa. What kinds of changes should the TPLF regime institute in the public political space to make genuine electoral democracy possible? An ideal step would be revisiting the four basic concepts that underpinned the drafting of the Transitional Charter, as enumerated in the Introduction of this work. One can list many other such desirable changes, but the following appear to be the absolute minimum.

The Constitution crafted for and by the TPLF has many shortcomings, but one can live with many of these if one condition is made possible: that the authorities which granted this constitution to the Ethiopian peoples be the first ones to start treating it with respect. Freedom of assembly and of expression are guaranteed—on paper. International humanitarian and human right conventions are declared as part of the law of the land—on paper. Hence, torture, extra-judicial killing, disappearance, and unlawful detention are proscribed—on paper. But the regime, according to local and foreign observers, has routinely violated these same principles that it has written into its constitution. It is extremely hypocritical for the regime to insist that others accept its constitution as a precondition for dialogue when it is the first to treat its own constitution with total contempt.

The controversy concerning whether or not the constitution is being upheld by the authorities brings to the fore a more underlying problem. This has to do with the supremacy of the law and the independence of the judicial institution that is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the rule of law. As it now exists, the regime denies all accusations of impropriety while the opposition groups remain convinced of the contrary. Hence, the absence of a neutral body that adjudicates between the power holders and the rest of the society has become glaringly self-evident. If the regime is truly committed to removing this obstacle, it can take one very simple but pivotal measure. It can invite all the country's major political actors to a conference at which this issue is jointly resolved. Out of such dialogue may perhaps emerge the beginnings of a system, attitude, and practice that can eventually mature into fully-fledged independent judicial system. If honestly and properly executed, the creation of a non-partisan genuinely independent judiciary could serve as the turning point in the process of putting the country's democratization back on track. Unless this is done, few self-respecting persons or groups would step into a political system in which the police force and the courts have been tainted with partisan association. And any group that does so will not go beyond serving as an ornamental "opposition force" that the regime will point to when accusations of intolerance are aired. Thus, doing everything possible to create public confidence in the judicial system is a minimal—but pivotal—step that needs to be taken.

Dealing with the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law can only serve as an entry point for de-linking the partisan from the public space and institutions. The others can, however, be addressed in due course. The country's defence and security establishments also need to be re-structured to gain the confidence of the public. The security of the country should be redefined so that the security and dignity of all the peoples of Ethiopia without exception whatsoever are equally protected. In such a manner that the security of the state is made to be founded on the security and dignity of all its component population and not the opposite

as has been the case to date. Only after such a structure has been put in place can the regime's rhetoric about "peace" and "stability" resonate with the spirit of the rest of the country. Only then can its demand regarding "renunciation of violence" be seen in a positive and constructive context. Otherwise it will amount to endorsing the regime's monopoly to employ violent means to deny others their legitimate rights. It will only worsen the humiliation of the peoples on whose behalf the concerned opposition groups speak.

Unless and until the absolute minimum step stated above is taken, continuing to talk about election is both useless and harmful. It is useless because it would not serve as an opportunity to bring about changes in the political life of the country. The same regime will repeatedly be returned to power to pursue the same policies. It is harmful because it will discredit the terms "election" and "democracy" in the eyes of the common person. It is also harmful because it will serve as an insult to the electorate's intelligence since the outcome of such an election is predetermined and known to the people long before the process takes place. Why waste the country's scarce resources and energy on such a useless exercise? Why should peasants be forced to take time out of their gruelling daily routines just so that the authorities can claim electoral victory?

THE OVERTHROWN ELITE'S PORTION

Two fundamental issues constitute the core of the overthrown elite's political agenda: (1) reclaiming Eritrea, and (2) denouncing what they call "ethnic politics." My view on how Eritrea's independence became inescapable is elaborated elsewhere thus making a return to that issue unnecessary. I will concentrate rather on the implications of the overthrown elite's obsession with what is dubbed as "ethnic politics."

The phrase "ethnic politics" and how it is being manipulated by "Ethiopian" political groups stands as a towering testimony to these groups' refusal to change. They behave as if they have found in the word "ethnic" some new concept that enables them to de-

nounce all other political stands that deviate from their own. But the underlying behavior is as old as these groups' arrival on the country's political scene. The word "ethnic" is nothing but the latest term employed by them with the express purpose of putting the spokespersons of non-Amhara peoples on the defensive. It has had such notorious predecessors as "tribalism" and "narrow nationalism." Demonizing those who spoke up for Ethiopia's subject peoples as "tribalists" or "narrow nationalists" and physically liquidating them has in the past completely failed to arrest the growing national awareness of the concerned peoples. Most of these peoples have now arrived at the stage where they do not expect anything positive from the so-called "Ethiopian unionist" forces. These forces should not assume that conscious members of other societies have not drawn a lesson from past history just because they themselves happen to be unwilling or unable to do so. Gone are the days when one could browbeat members of other national groups to successfully deter them from speaking up for their particular society. These societies have broken loose from the mental shackles with which all previous regimes attempted to detain their thought processes. These societies are now looking forward to the time when they will truly manage their local affairs in a manner that suits them. They are on the verge of becoming true masters in their own homes. There is no way that they can be forced to go back to their situation and status of yesteryears.

The so-called "Ethiopian unionist" forces try to make it appear as if their rhetoric about "ethnic politics" has some profound content. In reality, however, the issue is a very simple one. It is about convincing the Oromo, Sidama, Somali, Walayita, and other peoples not to use their own languages in courts, public administration offices, and schools. It is about convincing these peoples to patiently postpone gaining their rights of full citizenship until every single one of them becomes fluent in Amharic and in aping Amharic culture. It is about convincing these peoples that their identity and being an Ethiopian, let alone being an Ethiopian patriot, are mutually exclusive of each other. It is about persuading these victims of Emperor Menelik's conquest to forget their

resultant humiliation and loss of national rights and join the chorus that is singing his praise. It is about persuading these peoples that administration by a person other than one of their own is the only way by which their interests are best served.

There is another thing. Those who have made denouncing "ethnic politics" their peculiar preserve appear as if they are opposed to all "ethnic" particularism. In reality they are opposed to ethnonationalism only in so far as it does not apply to the Amharas. The All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO) is just as "ethnic" as the Oromo Liberation Front or the Sidama Liberation Movement, etc. But the AAPO is not only exempted from denunciation as "ethnic" but even has the sympathy and support of the so-called "Ethiopian" organizations. The AAPO leader, Asrat Woldeyes, is routinely portrayed as the quintessential "Ethiopian patriot." Hence, the proponents of this stand are sticking to the practice of equating Ethiopian patriotism with that of the Amhara. It is also a return to the practice of saying what is Amharic is national and what is not is either "tribal" or "ethnic." Ethiopian nationalism and Amhara nationalism are once again made to overlap and re-inforce each other.

The nationalist movements of the other peoples in fact came into existence mostly in reaction to this kind of Ethiopian nationalism. Continuing to demand of others no less than "ethnic suicide" so that Ethiopian-cum-Amhara nationalism would for ever flourish is unrealistic and naive. It can easily lead, as it indeed has to date, to the very opposite result. An Ethiopian state that refuses to embrace such large peoples as the Oromos, Walayitas, Sidamas, Somalis, etc. with their identities intact cannot possibly survive. It indeed does not deserve to survive. The time when founding the unity of a state on the graves of the identities and rights of peoples still looked feasible is now clearly over. Witness the revival of ethnic nationalism even in the European states, where the modern concept of "nationhood" first appeared and seemed to have achieved the highest level of maturity.

The forces that want to restore this outmoded manner of projecting the image of Ethiopian nationalism draw their members

from the most educated, sophisticated, and experienced sector of Ethiopian society. So it would be totally naive to assume that they are pursuing this obviously dangerous political line out of ignorance. They are playing up the bogey of "ethnic politics" to serve as a front for their actual political agenda. And that is to resist increasing democratization and the various peoples' right to have a say in their particular and common affairs. It is a cloak behind which lurks the desire to deny these peoples the right to have a choice—a choice of identity, of leaders, of which language to use as a medium of administration and education.

Finally, let me state what these forces can do to play a role in furthering the cause of democracy if they are genuinely interested in doing so. Their right to continuously denounce "ethnic politics" is recognized and should be respected. But how will the rights or wrongs of engaging in "ethnic politics" be decided? Are these forces willing to submit their case for adjudication by the electorate? Or are they still entertaining the re-conquest of the south with the aim of once again restoring rights bequeathed to them by the so-called constitution of 1931? Unless they are entertaining the latter option, I have a simple proposal to put to them. I challenge them to try out their vision in an open democratic contest. Let us first join forces to persuade the regime to institute the minimum reforms that I enumerated above. Then these forces can freely go to the Oromo and other peoples and convince them of the danger of having their clearly delineated regions, of using their languages in schools and government offices, and why electing one of their own as an administrator would be harmful. Is that too much to ask of people who have now, thanks to experiencing loss of power, included the respect of democratic liberties in their political discourse?

THE PORTION OF THE LEADERS OF SOUTHERN PEOPLES

A close look at the differences dividing the above two forces easily reveals their inconsequential nature. One group is employing the rhetoric of anti-ethnic politics to wave in the face of its constitu-

ency the bogeyman that lurks behind any move towards recognizing the peoples of southern Ethiopia as the country's citizens with their identities intact. The other one is abusing ethnic nationalism as a divide-and-rule strategy. One group wants to shift the country's politics to reverse gear while the other wishes to maintain the present status quo by firmly stepping on the brake of historical progress. Whether the present Ethiopian entity deserves to survive or not depends, more than anything else, on these two forces' willingness to revise their present stands. Particularly on whether these forces are willing to accept the rights of the rest of the peoples of Ethiopia to have a say in the running of their own particular affairs. And whether or not these forces are willing to recognize the independent spokespersons of the rest of the country's peoples as equal partners in determining the manner by which the common affairs of all the peoples are conducted to the benefit of each and all. Failing that, Ethiopia's survival as an entity will remain questionable. And its survival at the expense of the interests and identities of the majority of its inhabitants will definitely remain indefensible.

Contrary to the aspirations of the above two forces, the peoples of southern Ethiopia have nothing to lose and much to gain by going the remainder of the road to conclusively settle the interlocking questions of democratization and decolonization. How the leaders of the southern peoples go about putting their act together will have far reaching implications for the manner, speed, and ease with which this remainder of the road is traversed. By the southern peoples I mean all those who were drawn into the present Ethiopian state through a process of conquest roughly a century ago. What can serve as a common denominator for the political actors coming from these communities is also imbedded in this common historical experience. Loss of national rights, being relegated to a status less than of second class citizens, and losing control both over one's natural resources and over the fruits of the labor of one's people constitute the bulk of the common experience that binds these peoples together.

Beyond that, their diversity is not in doubt. However, emphasis on the diversity within and between these communities has routinely been blown out of all proportion by their previous and present rulers. Both of these rulers are bent on doing everything in their power to permanently damage relations between these peoples. Despite that, there is a widespread consensus among the members of these peoples regarding the need to join forces to push the process of democratization and decolonization forward. It is their political leaders that are failing to define the context within which this kind of pooling of energy can be made operational. The causes for this failure are many. Absence of mutual confidence, the machinations of the present and previous ruling elites, lack of sufficient political experience, and the lack of an opportunity to soberly weigh options figure prominently among these causes. But the most outstanding obstacle concerns defining the nature of the immediate joint venture.

In particular, divergence of opinion regarding the present federal structure is standing in the way of articulating such a joint mission. There are those who, as a reaction to the abuse that the term is suffering under the present rulers, are categorical in their rejection of the very term "federal." Still others seem to believe that a federal solution is not an adequate response to the demand for self-determination. To a significant number of political actors and ordinary citizens, however, the present federal structure, shorn of its undemocratic aspects, can serve as a framework that can move the political process forward. Resolving this controversy can go a long way towards paving the way for the articulation of a common plan of action by the peoples of southern Ethiopia.

The people who are facing perhaps the most difficult choice in this regard are Oromo political leaders. Firstly, they confront a unique dilemma which indicates that they will lose regardless of the choices they pick. If they start talking about seeking the resolution of the Oromo question within the context of the Ethiopian state, then they are easily accused of entertaining domination due to the size of the Oromo population. If they persist in seeking the restoration of the rights of the Oromo people alone, then they are

accused of being separatist with all the attendant stigma. They face a "Damned if you do, damned if you don't!" situation.

Secondly, Oromo political actors have repeatedly been let down by their northern partners at different times and within different contexts. A large number of Oromo youngsters flocked to the two country-wide Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist parties (EPRP and MAESON) in the early 1970s. It is conceivable that many did so in order to further also the interests of their own people within the context of effecting revolutionary change. Many of them perished in the internecine fighting and the murderous conflict with the Dergue. Yet, their sacrifices failed to nudge their northern "comrades" towards recognizing the Oromo people's minimum rights. In contrast, these former comrades of theirs are now in the forefront of the battle against Oromo rights under the guise of conducting anti-ethnic politics. Oromos who experienced this kind of betrayal by forces that appropriated the term "Ethiopian" exclusively to themselves have now become the most vociferous in their rejection of any and every thing connected with that name.

The disappointing manner in which OLF/TPLF co-operation was abused to serve the opposite purpose of the clearly defined aims that it was supposed to promote is the other historical object lesson. The numerous risky steps that the OLF took to make that co-operation serve the jointly declared objectives have been elaborated in an earlier section of this work. That exercise permanently damaged the image of the leading personalities who were involved in its implementation. Hence, the reluctance of new Oromo leaders to re-engage particularly northern Ethiopian political forces is understandable. Similarly, the failure of the Transitional Charter, the product of a joint TPLF/OLF initiative, has fomented an additional reluctance to start talking about seeking the resolution of the Oromo question within the context of the Ethiopian state.

In addition, as has been elaborated above, the term "Ethiopia" is often used as just another name for Abyssinia or even Amhara. Most southern nationalists are duty bound to reject this rendering of the meaning of "Ethiopia." This concern, which is

the most pronounced among Oromo political thinkers, goes beyond hampering interaction with northern political actors. In contrast to the Oromos, most other southern Ethiopian political actors do not have as much difficulty with the terms "Ethiopia" or "Ethiopian." In addition, at this stage they are not shying away from stating that they wish to see the resolution of their demands for self-determination within the context of the present state. To them federalism is not the anathema that it is to most Oromo political actors.

Should the Oromos continue to reject the term "Ethiopia" under any circumstance? If even the Abyssinians could appropriate a term originally coined to describe all dark-skinned peoples, why should the Oromos, who do not claim descent from a non-African origin, find it indefinitely impossible to accept the term? The reason is clear; it emanates from a reactive type of politics. Because the Abyssinians appropriated some term, Oromo political leaders now feel duty bound to reject it. The words "unity" and "socialism" were the first to suffer this fate. They are now being followed with such terms as "democracy" and "federalism." All the Abyssinians have to do to deny Oromo political actors the use of some concept seems to be to simply use it (or abuse it). This is gradually pushing Oromo political leaders into an awkward and ridiculous corner.

True, words play an important role in politics. Politicians choose those words that facilitate the transmission of their vision to their constituency and the world at large in the most effective way. They choose concepts and platforms that widen their support base and cut down that of their adversaries, both internally and internationally. It is when seen against this background that weighing the advantages and disadvantages of Oromos joining the southern peoples in re-claiming the name "Ethiopia" becomes easier to deal with. That it will remove the bulk of the obstacles standing in the way of forging a more meaningful and active co-operation between Oromo leaders and their southern counterparts is indisputable.

The content of a name does indeed matter more than its ring. What is Ethiopia? Who are the Ethiopians? These are the ques-

tions that are on the verge of conclusively getting their final answers. If Ethiopia continues to refuse embracing the Oromo and other peoples with their identities intact, if basing her existence on the negation of the political, economic and cultural rights of these peoples persists, then one can even go beyond just rejecting the name. Such a state indeed does not deserve to survive as it now exists, as I have stated above. Then Ethiopia would remain restricted to the home area of the people who have appropriated the name in an exclusive manner. On the other hand, if these wrongs are made right then she does not necessarily deserve to be dismantled either. Just as the survival of a state is not an end in itself, for me, doing away with it is also not an ultimate end. The survival of a state must be based on the good that it is serving. It must serve its constituent components on a fair basis. Its state power must draw legitimacy from the express will of all of its component parts through a credible democratic election. The terms for its governance must be crafted by the spokespersons of all the country's peoples and ratified by all concerned. Its patriotism must be the combined patriotism of all the inhabitants and not of a particular sector.

Similarly, the creation of one's independent state is not an end in itself, for me. Any people are entitled to have their independent state. This much has now been recognized even by the present rulers. There are those who, by overlooking this fact, still consider talking about "independent Oromia" as a testimony to one's ultra-nationalism. In addition, they seem to consider the realization of independence as the maximum end. Yes, there was a time when this kind of rhetoric was indeed necessary. That was at the time when the Oromo presence and voice were concealed, both at home and abroad, by being buried under an erroneous image of Ethiopia writ large. It was at the time when the Oromo political line was targeted for subordination to the competing political agendas of the forces of domination. Now, however, the Oromo identity stands on its own separate space. Oromo political voice is distinctly being heard both at home and abroad. What their leaders plan to do with this autonomous Oromo political energy is

what determines what constitutes the mission's maximum and minimum goals.

The search for a new and more ambitious political agenda points in one direction. The prevailing global and local political currents must be grasped into which such an agenda can be made to fit. And the core of the on-going trend appears to be quite obvious. States are increasingly pooling their resources to survive in the murderous economic competition that has come to grip the world of today. At the same time, devolution to regional, ethnic and religious communities within these entities is occurring. As a result, self-determination has taken on a wider spectrum of meaning than it used to prior to the end of the Cold War era. States and communities are in the process of exploring an optimum balance between independence and interdependence.

Seen within such a context, one thing becomes very clear about the future of the Oromos. Whether they carve their independent state or not, an intimate form of interaction with their neighbors, the majority of the remainder of Ethiopia's peoples, appears unavoidable. Hence, Oromo political leaders will sooner or later be forced to consider how to structure this inevitable interaction. And the sooner that this is done the better. Perhaps the best place to start is thinking about the advantages or disadvantages of considering the present federal set-up as a possible infrastructure for the exercise of self-determination.

Would the present federal set-up, shorn of its undemocratic features, afford the Oromo and other peoples the opportunity to finally take their proper places in the Ethiopian state and have influences commensurate with their demographic and economic contributions? Yes, such a vision collapsed when the TPLF disregarded the tenets of the Transitional Charter. That is indisputable and the anger and disappointment that it generated is understandable. Still, can one more attempt be made to test if a genuine federal solution will work? In running such a test, most of the other peoples of southern Ethiopia will be more prone to make a common cause with the Oromos. If it succeeds, well and good; if not, the Oromos and Ogadenis will not remain the only two south-

ern Ethiopian groups seeking independence and the inevitable break-up of the present entity.

If Oromo political leaders find engaging in such an exercise once again palatable, then they have to also stop being self-conscious about their role. They must take a serious and leading role in its implementation. Only then will the present contradictory messages imbedded in their political platform be put to rest. If such an exercise succeeds, Ethiopia will be changed for the better in a dramatic manner. The century-old agenda of both democratization and decolonization will be capped with success. Similarly, Ethiopia's influence on the rest of the Horn states will be transformed in a fundamental manner. If the Horn's largest and most populous state gets democratized, the same spirit can easily reverberate throughout the entire region. The previous practice, among the region's dictators, of supporting and subverting each other at the same time will be finally put to rest.

The resolution of the Oromo question, in one manner or another, will also play a pivotal role in affecting the future of not only Ethiopia but all the other Horn states. For Oromia is to Ethiopia what Ethiopia is to the Horn. The Oromos are Ethiopia's largest "ethnic" community whose region touches on the home areas of almost all the other inhabitants of the country. In like manner, Ethiopia is the Horn's most populous country sharing borders and communities with all the rest. Hence, its relations with the other Horn states are inevitably the most intimate. Thus, if Ethiopia resolves the questions of democratization and decolonization to the satisfaction of the Oromo and other southern peoples, then she will be that much more strengthened to play a proper and positive role in the Horn and the rest of Africa. If not, her inevitable break-up will considerably diminish her influence in regional and continental affairs. It is in the interest of the Oromos to give the former scenario one more try before finally resorting to the latter. I have personally come to the conclusion that the survival of the Oromo people has come to depend on democratizing and stabilizing not only the Ethiopian state but also the entire Horn region. Conflict between the Oromos and the Ethiopian state authorities as well as between

Ethiopia and other forces has negatively affected the Oromo people more than any other. The Oromo society has been the main pool of the cannon fodder perishing in all the wars conducted by Ethiopian regimes and Oromo resources have been—and continue to be—diverted into funding these wars.

There is no guarantee that just because Oromo political leaders adopt the above suggestion that things will suddenly become rosy. In fact, those forces that are determined to sustain their privileged status will fight tooth and nail to avert this final phase of the evolution of the Ethiopian state. They will do everything possible to sow discord not only between Oromos and their neighbors but also among Oromos. Hence, the alliance that can be struck with other forces having a similar interest as the Oromos will not be problem free. But with patience, honesty, and perseverance the confidence of such forces can be gained. Once this has been effected, the remainder of the road to the erasure of the colonial and undemocratic nature of the Ethiopian state will be relatively short and smooth.

The Role of External Influence

Ethiopia's latest attempt to conclusively settle the dual issues of decolonization and democratization coincided with a major global political upheaval. The Cold War came to an end followed by the unravelling of the USSR. Eastern European countries, who were held hostage by the global division that came into existence immediately after the end of the Second World War, got the unexpected opportunity of ridding themselves of the political system that they evidently did not relish. And this happened in a unique manner. Political change came about, not so much as a result of orchestration by a narrow circle of leaders, but mostly by mass action. The movement for change was owned and conducted by a wide range of groups representing diverse interests. This experience indicated a new form of bringing about political change and a clear departure from the Leninist legacy elaborated in a previous section.

Western powers are now taking credit for the manner in which the "evil empire" came to an end. How much of the pressures that brought about that change can actually be attributed to the activities of the Western intelligence services will be debated for a long time to come. However, that Western governments came to the support of those forces espousing democracy, after they came on the political scene, is less debatable. And these powers continued to influence the development emerging in the former East bloc countries with a view to keeping it on a track that was expected to culminate in the installation of a genuine democratic order. They are continuing to do so to this very day. Hence, a second factor that influences struggles for democracy started manifesting itself after this period. Western governments started to be seen as opposing dictatorships and supporting their opponents in a more direct and open manner.

Subsequent developments seemed to indicate that this indeed was going to be the new global trend. Much external pressure was brought to bear on the South African apartheid regime to start dismantling its odious racist state structure. The same factor persuaded the Israelis and Palestinians to consider compromise as the way out of the interminable conflict that periodically threatened to engulf the entire Middle East. In both the South African and the Palestinian experiences, the involvement of the international community had two clear implications. Firstly, pushing armed struggle to its conclusion was averted. Secondly, the process of the struggle for change got much more open drawing in diverse groups pursuing diversified approaches.

Cambodia's traumatic political experience necessitated a unique form of intervention. The UN was made to take over the government of Cambodia as a first step to installing a democratically elected government. Similarly, in Africa one authoritarian regime after another was pressed to end military or one-party rule.

Those of us who wanted to see a final settlement in Ethiopia's dual challenge of decolonization and democratization were encouraged by this global trend that started gathering momentum at the very time when transition to democracy got underway. It is

this expectation that encouraged OLF leaders, in particular, to invest heavily in the democratization pact that was ratified in 1991. Regional and global powers were expected to play a critical role in keeping the democratization process on track. Alas, as was documented in an earlier section, this expectation was not to be realized. The US Government, in fact, went to the extent of mobilizing one of its “eminent” scholars to advise the TPLF regime to forget about democratization. Subsequently, the US-led international community has decided to turn a deaf ear to all the regime’s violations of human rights, as regretted by such eminent watchdog agencies as Amnesty International.

Various rationales are routinely invoked to support this unique, US-led international community’s attitude toward the TPLF regime. In the earlier years of TPLF rule, “Ethiopia must be given time!” was voiced by the emissaries of these powers. Were the process on track, this would have sounded genuine. As the political atmosphere continued to grow increasingly intolerant, however, such an exercise of patience became indisputably disingenuous. How can one agree with such advice when the autonomous political space was inexorably becoming increasingly constricted? Thus, the policy of “giving Ethiopia time” was translated into nothing short of abandoning the fate of the country to the whims of TPLF leaders. The international endorsement that was signalled by this stand enabled the TPLF to eliminate some opposition groups and to cow others with total impunity. The new ruling clique went further and succeeded in crippling civic and professional groups as well as the fledgling independent press. The Ethiopian regime has now gone on to win for itself the honor of being described as the one of the world’s foremost enemies of the press. Yet this has failed to dent the regime’s growing popularity in the corridors of Western powers. Emboldened by this development, the regime went to the extent of intimidating even those elected to its so-called Parliament. Its hostility to autonomous voices got so threatening that even some of a couple of non-EPRDF members of the so-called Parliament were forced to choose going into exile.

Other rationales verge on the ludicrous. One European foreign service official dismissed criticism of the regime's violations of human rights by stating that "the Ethiopian government is not committing human rights violation as a matter of policy." Now, this is the most absurd defense of any offending regime that I have ever heard. Violation of human rights routinely results from the pursuit of other policy objectives and rarely, if at all, is it deliberately adopted as an aim in itself. Resort to such absurdities indicate the US-led international community's determination to look the other way while the TPLF regime is committing murder, torture, and other serious crimes against the populace.

The most common excuse for dismissing criticisms of the regime's human rights record, particularly in Oromia, is the OLF's espousal of armed struggle. This is often coupled with strong criticism of the OLF for seeking independence for Oromia. Hence, the message appears to signal that a regime can resort to all means, including violations of human rights, to defeat armed opposition and to avert the dismemberment of the country. If this rationale justifies perpetration of human rights violations, then why should members of the previous regime stand trial for committing the same kinds of crime under an even more threatening situation of internal and inter-state conflict? Denouncing the OLF for demanding independence is even more ironic. The TPLF is winning high marks for enshrining the right to secession in its constitution. Thus, presumably the pursuit of independence is now a constitutional right. Why should the OLF be denounced for demanding the same principle that is winning the TPLF so much accolade?

The practice of condemning a liberation front supported by the opposing camp as terrorist and vice versa came to an end when the Cold War ended. In addition, frowning on armed means to effect political change started becoming the trend. This was actually a welcome development when seen against the background of numerous experiences in which such armed conquests of power routinely failed to usher in a democratic order. Coupled with a clear signal to the incumbent to open up the political space by

respecting the rule of law and human and humanitarian laws, such a stand could easily render the pursuit of armed means superfluous. If the contrary happens, however, as in the case of Ethiopia, then the end result is self-evident. Using armed and other coercive means to settle any competition in its favor becomes the exclusive monopoly of the incumbent. Unless the US-led international community reverses its present handling of the Ethiopian regime all those forces who wish to pursue peaceful political competition will remain not only frustrated but also in daily danger of losing their lives and self respect.

The implications of the continuation of the present trend is quite dangerous. The regime will remain confirmed in its belief that the ultimate stage in the evolution of the Ethiopian state has been attained. It will continue to use heavy-handed means to deal with all those that wish to move the process forward to end the lingering features of Ethiopia's imperial and undemocratic tradition. It may succeed in containing and even eliminating all armed opposition groups under the prevailing regional and international situation. But it will definitely fail to remove the underlying causes of discontent. Hence, disaffection will go underground and anger and frustration will continue to simmer. How this will erupt into open conflict will be difficult to foresee. However, one thing is indisputable. In the words of John F. Kennedy, "those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolutions inevitable." All forms of political violence are destructive and need to be averted. But the most dangerous forms of violent political conflict are the disorganized ones lacking leadership and clearly defined political objectives. I am afraid that, unless proper changes are instituted, the next upheaval in Ethiopia could take on such features.

Foreign emissaries often declare that how change comes to their country is the affair of Ethiopian political forces. True, no outside force can articulate the agenda for change and pay the necessary sacrifices needed to implement it. But the assumed neutrality of the US-led international community that is reflected in such statements is far from the truth. How can foreign governments pretend

that they are neutral when facilities provided by them are implicated in the violation of human rights? The most outstanding such case is the manner in which one of the leaders of the Ethiopian Teachers Association, Asefa Maru, lost his life. British-trained Ethiopian police drove up to this person in British-provided vehicles and shot him dead within earshot of some of the major embassies. Admittedly, the British government did protest such an abuse of its co-operation. However, when criticism of the Ethiopian government failed to gather momentum, the British government was forced to back down. With a little backing from particularly the US Government, the opposite could have started to happen. Should one then be surprised that the US Government's backing of the present regime is having implications for Ethiopian public opinion about Americans? The previous commonly held perception of the US as a champion of democracy has totally been reversed in recent years in Ethiopia. The US Government stand in Ethiopia is now commonly perceived as being completely pro-government.

Why the US-led international community is behaving in this peculiar way in Ethiopia is often a subject of speculation by members of opposition groups. It is often said that economic considerations outweigh all other factors that influence US foreign policy. Presumably this means that creating conducive conditions for foreign investment is given more emphasis than ethical values as a basis of US foreign policy. So, all a regime has to do to win the wholehearted backing of the US and its partners is to demonstrate an ability and determination to effectively police foreign investment. This could very well be the determining factor in US foreign policy. Then siding with a regime with the narrowest social base is an exercise in maximizing short-sightedness. How often have such regimes unexpectedly come crashing down, thus endangering the foreign interests that they were supposed to police? Even when seen within this very selfish pragmatic context, the present attitude of the US-led international community towards the current rulers of Ethiopia remains inexplicable.

If the world powers are really interested in the survival of the Ethiopian state, as they continue to indicate, then they should do everything possible to put back on track the derailed democratization and decolonization process. They do not need to do anything out of the ordinary to contribute to such an effort. All they have to do is apply to the Ethiopian regime the same conditionalities that they insist on wherever else they provide economic and political support. Insisting on respect of human rights, the rule of law and thus creating conducive conditions for competitive fair and free elections is all they need to do. Then the regime may be persuaded to start making the changes enumerated above. Similarly, then opposition groups would be more encouraged to re-enter the political process.

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION

The factors enumerated above are by no means the only ones that could put back on the track much needed program of decolonizing and democratizing Ethiopia. What is attempted here is merely to invite debate on how to avert the continuation of the present disappointment and its implications for peace, stability, and development. And the line-up of Ethiopia's political opinion may not be restricted to the above three poles. But I have reasons to believe that the existence of such a three-way division may be the basis of a positive development under one particular circumstance, and that is shifting the determination of the virtue of a political stand from coercion to persuasion and public endorsement. Under such a circumstance, the roughly three-way division could actually serve as the foundation of a much more stable democratic political order.

The core values of all three poles could serve as the borders delimiting the tendencies of the country's political situation. What is needed to make the interaction between adherents of these three stands just and constructive is to agree on the need to abide by basic democratic principles. In addition, the rules of the political game that govern competition between these three poles need to

be defined and agreed to. Once this is accomplished, the birth of a New Ethiopia—an Ethiopia owned and governed by representatives of all her component communities—will be realized. This is my hope and wish.

Appendix

TRANSITIONAL PERIOD CHARTER OF ETHIOPIA

TRANSITIONAL PERIOD CHARTER OF ETHIOPIA

WHEREAS the overthrow of the military dictatorship that has ruled Ethiopia for seventeen years presents a historical moment, providing the Peoples of Ethiopia with the opportunity to rebuild the country and restructure the state democratically;

WHEREAS the military dictatorship was, in essence, a continuation of the previous regimes and its demise marks the end of an era of subjugation and oppression thus starting a new chapter in Ethiopian history in which freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all peoples shall be the governing principles of political, economic and social life and thereby contributing to the welfare of the Ethiopian Peoples and rescuing them from centuries of subjugation and backwardness;

WHEREAS peace and stability, as essential conditions of development, require the end of all hostilities, the healing of wounds caused by conflicts and the establishment and maintenance of good neighbourliness and co-operation;

WHEREAS for the fulfilment of the aforementioned conditions and for the reign of a just peace, the proclamation of a democratic order is a categorical imperative, and;

WHEREAS to this end, all institutions of repression installed by the previous regimes shall be dismantled, regional prejudices redressed and the rights and interests of the deprived citizens safeguarded by a democratic government elected by and accountable to the People;

WHEREAS from The Peace Loving and Democratic forces present in the Ethiopian society and having Varied Views, having met in a Conference convened from July 1 - 5 in Addis Ababa, have discussed and approved the charter laying down the rules governing The Transitional Government as well as setting down the principles for the transitional period,

NOW, THEREFORE, it is hereby proclaimed as follows;

PART ONE

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Article One

Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly by resolution 217 A (III) of 10 Dec. 1948, individual human rights shall be respected fully, and without any limitation whatsoever. Particularly every individual shall have:

- a) The freedom of conscience, expression, association and peaceable assembly;
- b) The right to engage in unrestricted political activity and to organise political parties, provided the exercise of such right does not infringe upon the rights of others.

Article Two

The right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nation, nationality and people is guaranteed the right to:

- a) Preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its culture and history and use and develop its language;
- b) Administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom, and fair and proper representation;
- c) Exercise its rights to self-determination of independence, when the concerned, nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated.

PART TWO

PRINCIPLES GUIDING FOREIGN POLICY

The Transitional Government will conduct its foreign relations on the basis of the principles of respect for the sovereignty and equality of states and non-intervention and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as the promotion of mutual interests. Accordingly;

Article Three

The policy of destabilization and conflict-promotion hitherto actively pursued by the previous regime with respect to the country's neighbors shall cease forthwith with the issuance of this Charter.

Article Four

It shall abide by all mutual agreements that respect the sovereignty of Ethiopia and are not contrary to the interests of the People.

Article Five

Local governments shall have the right to establish direct contact with relief organizations with respect to relief work.

PART THREE

STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

Article Six

There shall be established a Transitional Government consisting of a Council of Representatives and a Council of Ministers.

Article Seven

The Council of Representatives shall be composed of representatives of national liberation movements, other political organizations and prominent individuals, to make-up a total of no more than 87 members.

Article Eight

The Transitional Government shall exercise all legal and political responsibility for the governance of Ethiopia until it hands over power to a government popularly elected on the basis of a new Constitution.

Article Nine

The Council of Representatives shall exercise legislative functions as follows and oversee the work of the Council of Ministers:

- a) draw-up its rules of procedure.
- b) election of its Chairperson, who shall also be the Head of State, and a Vice-Chairperson and Secretary, the Head of State shall appoint the Prime Minister, whose appointment shall be approved by the Council of Representatives. The Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Vice-Chairperson and Secretary of the Council of Representatives shall be from different nations/nationalities;
- c) approve the Prime Minister's nomination of the members of Council of Ministers drawn-up on consideration of ascertaining a broad national representation, technical competence and unswerving adherence to the Charter;
- d) initiation and promulgation of proclamations and decrees pursuant to the Charter;
- e) adoption of national budget;
- f) provide for the administration of justice on the basis of the Charter; the Courts shall, in their work, be free from any governmental interference with respect to items provided for in Part One, Article One of the Charter;
- g) establish the Constitutional Commission;
- h) ratify international agreements;
- i) create committees for defence and security policy during the transitional period;
- j) provide the mechanism to ascertain the fair and impartial application of the mass media;
- k) issue just labour law that protects the rights and interests of the workers;

PART FOUR

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

The following provisions for a transitional period have been adopted in order to lead the country towards full democracy.

A. POLITICAL

Article Ten

The Council of Representatives shall constitute the Constitutional Commission to draw up a draft constitution.

The Constitutional Commission shall submit to the Council of Representatives the draft constitution.

Article Eleven

Upon adoption of the draft constitution by the Council of Representatives, the Constitution shall be presented to the people for discussion.

The final draft shall be presented for adoption to the Constituent Assembly to be elected pursuant to the final draft of the Constitution.

Article Twelve

Elections to a National Assembly shall be held on the basis of the provisions of the new Constitution.

The Transitional Government shall handover power to the party or parties that gain a majority in the National Assembly.

The said national elections shall be held no later than two years after the establishment of the Transitional Government. Provided, however, that the period can be extended by the Council of Representatives for no more than six months.

Article Thirteen

There shall be a law establishing local and regional councils for local administrative purposes defined on the basis of nationality. Elections for such local and regional councils shall be held within three

months of the establishment of the Transitional Government, wherever local conditions allow.

B. RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

The Transitional Government is unequivocally determined to ensure the delivery of relief assistance to areas ravaged by war and drought. In connection with this:

Article Fourteen

It shall give priority to the rehabilitation of those areas that have been severely affected by the war, prisoners of war, ex-prisoners of war as well as those sections of the population that have been forcibly uprooted by the previous regime's policy of villagization and resettlement.

The rehabilitation of those forcibly uprooted by the previous regime's policy of villagization and resettlement shall be done in accordance with their desire.

Article Fifteen

It shall take immediate steps to reconstruct or repair the infrastructure that has been destroyed or damaged by the war.

Article Sixteen

It shall give special consideration to hitherto neglected and forgotten areas.

Article Seventeen

It shall make special efforts to dispel ethnic mistrust and eradicate the ethnic hatred that have been fostered by the previous regimes.

PART FIVE**LEGALITY OF THE CHARTER*****Article Eighteen***

This Charter shall serve as the supreme law of the land for the duration of the transitional period.

Any law or decision in contrary to the Charter shall be null and void.

Article Nineteen

The Amharic and the English texts of this Charter have equal authenticity. Where disparity occurs between the two languages the Council of Representatives shall decide.

Article Twenty

This Charter shall be effective upon publication in the *Negarit Gazette*.

Addis Ababa this 22nd day of July 1991

MELES ZENAWI

CHAIRMAN OF THE CONFERENCE

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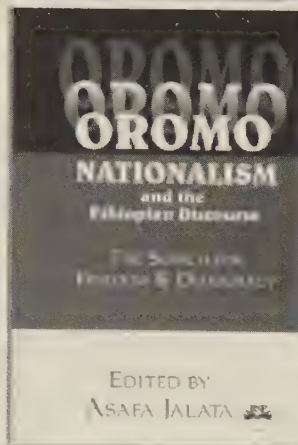
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Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy

Asafa Jalata

1-56902-065-5 hc \$79.95

1-56902-066-3 pb \$21.95

The contributors of this provocative but timely book argue that the Oromo nation is currently engaged in a liberation struggle from the Ethiopian colonial ruling classes and their supporters. The main objectives of the Oromo national movement are the restoration of the

Oromo democratic tradition known as *gada*, liberation of Oromia from foreign domination, and the fundamental transformation of the Oromo nation politically, culturally and economically. It is further argued in the book that the Oromo, who constitute a numerical majority in Eastern Africa, should build multinational societies based on consociational or real representative democracy.

The essays in this book examine the historical and cultural factors that have contributed to the emergence and development of Oromo nationalism, the essence of this nationalism, and the prospects of the Oromo national struggle, as well as the Ethiopian reaction to it. The book provides a multidimensional and critical interpretation of the Oromo national movement by bringing together the expertise of outstanding intellectuals and prominent Oromo politicians.

Besides the editor, the contributors are Lemmu Baissa, Leenco Lata, Edmond Keller, Kuwee Kumsa, John Sorenson and Mohammed Hassen. Although the contributors have different approaches, they agree that the Oromo have been suffering under the domination of the Ethiopian and modern world systems. Their national struggle for self-determination, social justice, and democracy has begun to have some impact. Further, the book makes the case that the Oromo national movement is gradually evolving as the main political and cultural force to counter Ethiopian colonialism.

Asafa Jalata is an associate professor of Sociology and African and African American Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is the author of *Oromia & Ethiopia*, and has published extensively in various scholarly journals. He is the editor of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.

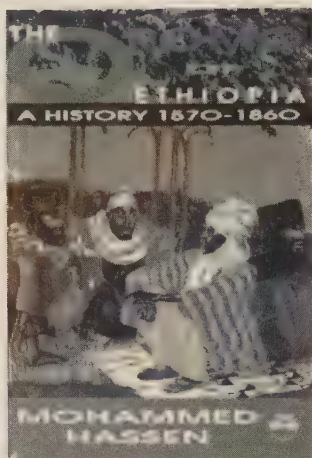
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The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860

Mohammed Hassen

0-932415-94-6 hc \$69.95

0-932415-95-4 pb \$19.95

The Oromo, who constitute nearly half the population of Ethiopia, are the largest single national group in the Horn of Africa. Yet the history of the

Oromo has been totally neglected. Since the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire in the 1880s, historians have chosen to ignore the Oromo, who, for political reasons, were portrayed as “newcomers” to Ethiopia and generally considered as people “without history.” This study breaks with that tradition and establishes conclusively not only that the Oromo were one of the indigenous peoples of Ethiopia, but also that they had their own fascinating history, culture, religion, and political institutions.

Mohammed Hassen was born to an Oromo peasant family in Hararghe, Eastern Ethiopia. He was educated in both Ethiopia and England. He received his doctorate in African History from the University of London. He taught for six years in Ethiopia and three years at Atlanta University, Georgia, where he was also an Adjunct Professor of History at Morehouse College. After serving as an Associate Professor of African History at Hunter College, the City University of New York, he is now teaching at Georgia State University.

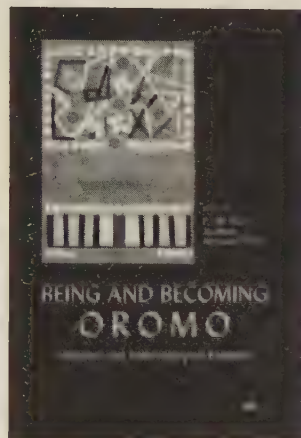
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Being And Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries

*Edited by P.T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin and
Alessandro Triulzi*

1-56902-025-6 *hc* \$79.95

1-56902-034-5 *pb* \$24.95

The Oromo are one of the most numerous peoples of Africa but general recognition of their distinctive culture and identity is comparatively recent. The workshop, *Being and Becoming Oromo*, held in October 1994, was

hosted jointly the NordicAfrica Institute and the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg. The purpose was to bring together scholars from different disciplines working on the Oromiffa speaking people of Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. The essays in this volume, through an examination of the Oromo experience, seek to explain why recognition took so long and to analyze some aspects of Oromo culture. The contributions are by: P.T.W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi, Hawani Debella and Aneesa Kassam, Herebert S. Lewis, Mekuria Bulcha, Mohammed Hassen, Gemetchu Megerssa, Thomas Zitelmann, Paolo Tablino, Gufu Oba, Johan Helland, Marco Bassi, Gudrun Dahl, Mario Aguilar, Tesema Ta'a, Odd Eirik Arnesen, Hector Blackhurst, and Abdullahi A. Shongolo.

Jan Hultin teaches Social Anthropology at the University of Gothenburg. He is the author of *The Long Journey: Essays on History, Descent and Land Tenure Among the Macha Oromo* (1987) and several papers on Oromo society and culture. He has also worked extensively in the development field.

Paul Baxter is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. He has published several papers, mainly on the Booran and the Arsi.

Alessandro Triulzi teaches African History at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples. He has published extensively on aspects of Oromo history and is the author of *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of a No-Man's Land, Bela Shangul, Wallaga, Ethiopia (ca. 1800-1898)* (1981).

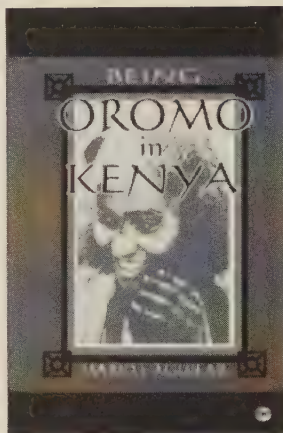
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Being Oromo in Kenya

Mario I. Aguilar

0-86543-568-5 hc \$69.95

0-86543-569-3 pb \$19.95

The Oromo are one of the most numerous people of Africa, but general recognition of their distinctive culture and identity is comparatively recent. Most of the Oromo live in Ethiopia; however a significant number of them form part of the modern Republic of Kenya. These are the

subject of this study, carried out through several years of fieldwork in Kenya, and research into historical archives and sustained collections of oral narratives.

Mario Aguilar explores one of the less researched aspects of cultural, political and national identity, namely religion and ritual. It is through ritual that the Boorana (Oromo) of Eastern Kenya have remained part of a wider political process affecting the whole Oromo nation. As most scholars have pointed out in the past, the Booran have converted to Islam and Christianity, and it is with those historical processes in mind that the author explores the role of age groups in social-political transformations, while describing the ritual of life of an African community today.

The book constitutes an exhaustive study of the Oromo religion in Kenya, and it develops the concept of a "religious diversification" rather than of syncretism. The study portrays the dynamics of pastoralism in Kenya as an important phenomenon for our understanding of the modern African nation-states, and the challenge it poses to the centralization of the modern post-colonial state in Kenya.

Mario I. Aguilar lectures in Social Anthropology and the study of World Religions at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. He is the author of *Ministry to Social & Religious Outcasts in Africa* (Gaba/Kenya; 1995), *Dios en Africa: Elementos Para una Antropologia de la Religion* (EVD /Spain 1997), and a forthcoming volume, *Narrative and Interpretations of Ethnic Conflict in Rwanda* (Gaba/Kenya). He is also a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.

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Jimma Abba Jifar, an Oromo Monarchy: Ethiopia, 1830 - 1932

With a new Afterword

Herbert S. Lewis

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The Kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar, established about 1830, was the largest and most powerful of five monarchies formed by the Oromo in the Gibe region of southwestern Ethiopia. Although the Oromo are known for their democratic ("republican") *gada* system, Jimma and the

other Gibe states arose through a series of processes and historical events in the 19th century that propelled certain men into positions of superpower. The book, based primarily on intensive fieldwork in Jimma, presents a study of the history and organization of Jimma under its most powerful ruler, Abba Jifar II (1878 – 1932). The author stresses the dynamic aspects of politics and places the political history and structure of Jimma in comparative perspective, noting similarities and differences in processes and structures to monarchical systems elsewhere in Africa and the world.

In addition to its historical dimension, this book also presents an ethnographic study of an Oromo Muslim agricultural community. The author points to distinctive aspects of Oromo culture that seems to have given Jimma Abba Jifar its particular political style. This book was one of the first published professional anthropological works about the Oromo. Professor Lewis' effective use of the sociological principles of Max Weber has enabled him to put the kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar in a frame of reference, which will make it comprehensible and readily comparable with other monarchic states. For this reason, and because of the unique institutional structure of the Oromo kingdom, the book will be of interest to social scientists in general, as well as to African anthropologists and historians.

Herbet S. Lewis, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has been concerned with Oromo and Ethiopian studies since the late 1950s. In addition to this book and numerous articles about various aspects of Oromo culture and history, he is the author of *After the Eagles Landed: The Yemenites of Israel*, a study of cultural change and ethnicity.

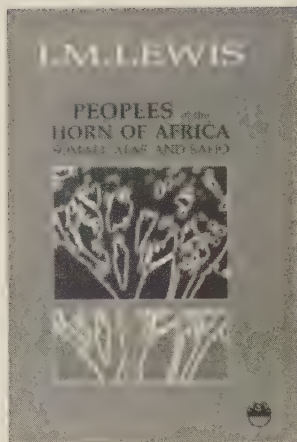
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Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar and Saho

I. M. Lewis

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This book has, from its first publication, been an essential reference tool for research of any aspect of society, history and culture in this part of Africa. Originally published in 1955 as part of the International African Institute's landmark Ethnographic Survey of Africa series, it was reprinted in 1969 with a new bibliography. This new edition contains further supplemental and previously unpublished material based on Professor Lewis' later field research on land-holding systems in the Somali riverine regions.

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Ioan M. Lewis has been professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics since 1969, and is consultative director of the International African Institute. He has written 18 books, five on different aspects of Somali culture and society where he started carrying out fieldwork in 1955. His latest book published by the Red Sea Press is *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (1994).

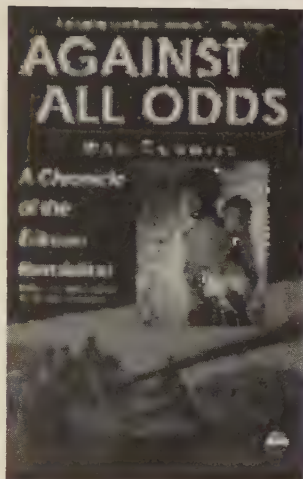
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Against All Odds:

**A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution
With a New Afterword on the Postwar
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Against All Odds is the firsthand account of Eritrea's epic 30-year struggle for political independence and social justice. With almost no outside support, Eritrean nationalists brought successive US- and Soviet-backed Ethiopian governments to their knees. At the same time, they worked to liberate women, workers and peasant farmers from centuries of grinding poverty, chronic hunger and numbing oppression. Connell argues that it was the blending of a social revolution with political objectives that enabled this uniquely self-reliant liberation front to weld Eritrea's fractious society—half Christian, half Muslim, from nine ethnic groups—into one of the most remarkable fighting forces in modern history. In a new Afterword, he describes their efforts to translate wartime values and experiences into sustainable strategies for developing the new country.

Dan Connell has covered Eritrea for the BBC, Reuters, *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Guardian* (New York) and other print and broadcast media in North America and Europe. The founder and former director of Grassroots International, Connell now divides his time between teaching, writing and public speaking on democracy and social justice in Third World societies. He and his wife, photographer Debbie Hird, live in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

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Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning

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“A perceptive study of the essence of Eritrean nationalism.”

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Roy Pateman traces the Eritreans' response to Ethiopian occupation of their land and the origins of the war. He provides a survey of Eritrean history, with a special inside look at the military and other developments in the last two decades. Pateman examines the impact of US foreign policy on the region and the people, the political ideologies of the independence movement, the tragic famine that took tens of thousands of lives, and the vision of the liberation fighters for a post-independence society. The book has been updated to provide readers with an insight into developments of the post-independence period.

Roy Pateman is a professor of International Relations and Comparative Politics at UCLA. He previously taught at Princeton and Stanford Universities, and has taught and done research in Europe, Africa and Australasia.

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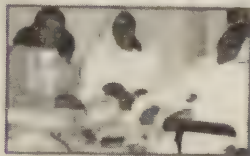
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Eccentric Graces

Eritrea and Ethiopia

Through the Eyes of a Traveler



Julia Stewart

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Eritrea and Ethiopia Through the Eyes of
a Traveler

Julia Stewart

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"This long-awaited travelogue gently brings the pulse of Eritrea and Ethiopia to life. No one eager to know them should miss it."

—Frank Smyth, journalist

There are some places that hound the imagination of a traveler years before they actually have the opportunity to visit. This is how the ancient lands of Eritrea and Ethiopia beckoned to author Julia Stewart.

Breathtaking landscapes, attractive citizens, intricately spiced foods, a gentle culture and rich history—it was all waiting for her. All of these things, Stewart came to experience and appreciate with abundance. What she did not predict were several mysterious happenings: harassment at the hands of "union busters," an impromptu running of the bulls, coming face to face with abject poverty, and her own reactions to these unpredictable events. Stewart's travels to Eritrea and Ethiopia are of a recent vintage, unlike those of famous explorers of an earlier period such as Richard Burton and James Bruce. Her travels took place during a post-war era when tremendous changes were occurring in the political and social lives of the people of the two countries.

Stewart found many surprises, good and bad, and she shares them all with her readers. Despite a sometimes arduous adventure, Stewart's fascination for Eritrea and Ethiopia has not ceased.

Julia Stewart lived in Nairobi, Kenya, for six years where she worked for Interaid International and the United Nations' World Food Program. Over the past decade she has traveled and worked in 14 African countries. She is the author of four books and currently resides in Westerville, Ohio.

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—Prof. Mohammed Hassen, author of *The Oromo of Ethiopia* (RSP, 1994)

This work traces the evolution of the modern Ethiopian State and its consolidation under the last three successive regimes. Leenco Lata critically assesses the Transitional Period of the post-Dergue era between the July 1991 Conference, which ratified the Transitional Charter and the formation of the Transition Government of Ethiopia, and August 21, 1995, when the new Federal Constitution of Ethiopia was ratified. The author argues that the overthrow of the Dergue regime and the adoption of a democratic agenda in July 1991 was an important historical juncture that afforded Ethiopia the opportunity to make a clean break with her imperial and autocratic past. As the deputy Secretary General of the Oromo Liberation Front, one of the major organizations to participate in the July 1991 Conference, Leenco Lata was deeply involved in the task of drawing up Ethiopia's post-Dergue political structure and the arduous task of drawing up a framework to democratize Ethiopia and make it a viable operational state. This book is a detailed firsthand account of how "this latest opportunity to decolonize and democratize the Ethiopian state ended in a disappointing failure." Furthermore, the factors that favored or stood in the way of effecting a genuine transition to democracy are also catalogued and discussed in depth. In particular, the US-led international community's influence, the key factor that could have kept the democratization process on track, is analyzed. In the final section, the author presents his recipe for change: The Ethiopian state must be further decentralized, decolonized and democratized if it is to escape the harrowing consequences of disintegration.

Leenco Lata is a founding member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and has been serving in the Front's executive bodies since its inception. As the Deputy Secretary General of the OLF, he played a central role with the other leaders of OLF and TPLF/EPRDF in the drafting of the Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia in July of 1991. Educated as a chemical engineer in America, Leenco Lata served the Ethiopian government in various technical capacities from 1972 to 1978 prior to joining the OLF.

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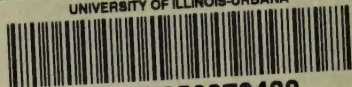
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